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# Investigator's Guide To Allegations Of "Ritual" Child Abuse

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## Introduction

Since 1981 I have been assigned to the Behavioral Science Unit at the FBI Academy in Quantico, Virginia, and have specialized in studying all aspects of the sexual victimization of children. The FBI Behavioral Science Unit provides assistance to criminal justice professionals in the United States and foreign countries. It attempts to develop practical applications of the behavioral sciences to the criminal justice system. As a result of training and research conducted by the Unit and its successes in analyzing violent crime, many professionals contact the Behavioral Science Unit for assistance and guidance in dealing with violent crime, especially those cases considered different, unusual, or bizarre. This service is provided at no cost and is not limited to crimes under the investigative jurisdiction of the FBI.

In 1983 and 1984, when I first began to hear stories of what sounded like satanic or occult activity in connection with allegations of sexual victimization of children (allegations that have come to be referred to most often as "ritual" child abuse), I tended to believe them. I had been dealing with bizarre, deviant behavior for many years and had long since realized that almost anything is possible. Just when you think that you have heard it all, along comes another strange case. The idea that there are a few cunning, secretive individuals in positions of power somewhere in this country regularly killing a few people as part of some satanic ritual or ceremony and getting away with it is certainly within the realm of possibility. But the number of alleged cases began to grow and grow. We now have hundreds of victims alleging that thousands of offenders are abusing and even murdering tens of thousands of people as part of organized satanic cults, and there is little or no corroborative evidence. The very reason many "experts" cite for believing these allegations (i.e. many victims, who never met each other, reporting the same events), is the primary reason I began to question at least some aspects of these allegations.

I have devoted more than seven years part-time, and eleven years full-time, of my professional life to researching, training, and consulting in the area of the sexual victimization of children. The issues of child sexual abuse and exploitation are a big part of my professional life's work. I have no reason to deny their existence or nature. In fact I have done everything I can to make people more aware of the problem Some have even blamed me for helping to create the hysteria that has led to these bizarre allegations. I can accept no outside income and am paid the same salary by the FBI whether or not children are abused and exploited - and whether the number is one or one million. As someone deeply concerned about and professionally committed to the issue, I did not lightly question the allegations of hundreds of victims child sexual abuse and exploitation.

In response to accusations by a few that I am a "satanist" who has infiltrated the FBI to facilitate cover-up, how does anyone (or should anyone have to) disprove such allegations? Although reluctant to dignify such absurd accusations with a reply, all I can say to those who have made such allegations that they are wrong and to those who heard such allegations is to carefully consider the source.

The reason I have taken the position I have is not because I support or believe in "satanism", but because I sincerely believe that my approach is the proper and most effective investigative strategy. I believe that my approach is in the best interest of victims of child sexual abuse. It would have been easy to sit back, as many have, and say nothing

publicly about this controversy. I have spoken out and published on this issue because I am concerned about the credibility of the child sexual abuse issue and outraged that, in some cases, individuals are getting away with molesting children because we can't prove they are satanic devil worshippers who engage in brainwashing, human sacrifice, and cannibalism as part of a large conspiracy.

There are many valid perspectives from which to assess and evaluate victim allegations of sex abuse and exploitation. Parents may choose to believe simply because their children make the claims. The level of proof necessary may be minimal because the consequences of believing are within the family. One parent correctly told me, "I believe what my child needs me to believe."

Therapists may choose to believe simply because their professional assessment is that their patient believes the victimization and describes it so vividly. The level of proof necessary may be no more than therapeutic evaluation because the consequences are between therapist and patient. No independent corroboration may be required.

A social worker must have more real, tangible evidence of abuse in order to take protective action and initiate legal proceedings. The level of proof necessary must be higher because the consequences (denial of visitation, foster care) are greater.

The law enforcement officer deals with the criminal justice system. The levels of proof necessary are reasonable suspicion, probable cause, and beyond a reasonable doubt because the consequences (criminal investigation, search and seizure, arrest, incarceration) are so great. This discussion will focus primarily on the criminal justice system and the law enforcement perspective. The level of proof necessary for taking action on allegations of criminal acts must be more than simply the victim alleged it and it is possible. This in no way denies the validity and importance of the parental, therapeutic, social welfare, or any other perspective of these allegations.

When, however, therapists and other professionals begin to conduct training, publish articles, and communicate through the media, the consequences become greater, and therefore the level of proof must be greater. The amount of corroboration necessary to act upon allegations of abuse is dependent upon the consequences of such action. We need to be concerned about the distribution and publication of unsubstantiated allegations of bizarre sexual abuse. Information needs to be disseminated to encourage communication and research about the phenomena. The risks, however, of intervenor and victim "contagion" and public hysteria are potential negative aspects of such dissemination. Because of the highly emotional and religious nature of this topic, there is a greater possibility that the spreading of information will result in a kind of self- fulfilling prophesy.

If such extreme allegations are going to be disseminated to the general public, they must be presented in the context of being assessed and evaluated, at least, from the professional perspective of the disseminator and, at best, also from the professional perspective of relevant others. This is what I will attempt to do in this discussion. The assessment and evaluation of such allegations are areas where law enforcement, mental health, and other professionals (anthropologists, folklorists, sociologists, historians, engineers, surgeons, etc.) may be of some assistance to each other in validating these cases individually and in general.

## Historical Overview

In order to attempt to deal with extreme allegations of what constitute child sex rings, it is important to have an historical perspective of society's attitudes about child sexual abuse. I will provide a brief synopsis of recent attitudes in the United States here, but those desiring more detailed information about such societal attitudes, particularly in other cultures and in the more distant past, should refer to Florence Rush's book *The Best Kept Secret: Sexual Abuse of Children* (1980) and Sander J. Breiner's book *Slaughter of the Innocents* (1990).

Society's attitude about child sexual abuse and exploitation can be summed up in one word: *denial*. Most people do not want to hear about it and would prefer to pretend that child sexual victimization just does not occur. Today, however, it is difficult to pretend that it does not happen. Stories and reports about child sexual victimization are daily occurrences.

It is important for professionals dealing with child sexual abuse to recognize and learn to manage this denial of a serious problem. Professionals must overcome the denial and encourage society to deal with, report, and prevent sexual victimization of children.

Some professionals, however, in their zeal to make American society more aware of this victimization, tend to exaggerate the problem. Presentations and literature with poorly documented or misleading claims about one in three children being sexually molested, the $5 billion child pornography industry, child slavery rings, and 50,000 stranger-abducted children are not uncommon. The problem is bad enough; it is not necessary to exaggerate it. Professionals should cite reputable and scientific studies and note the sources of information. If they do not, when the exaggerations and distortions are discovered, their credibility and the credibility of the issue are lost.

**"Stranger Danger".**

During the 1950s and 1960s the primary focus in the literature and discussions on sexual abuse of children was on "stranger danger" - the dirty old man in the wrinkled raincoat. If one could not deny the existence of child sexual abuse, one described victimization in simplistic terms of good and evil. The "stranger danger" approach to preventing child sexual abuse is clear-cut. We immediately know who the good guys and bad guys are and what they look like.

The FBI distributed a poster that epitomized this attitude. It showed a man, with his hat pulled down, hiding behind a tree with a bag of candy in his hands. He was waiting for a sweet little girl walking home from school alone. At the top it read: "Boys and Girls, color the page, memorize the rules." At the bottom it read: "For your protection, remember to turn down gifts from strangers, and refuse rides offered by strangers." The poster clearly contrasts the evil of the offender with the goodness of the child victim.

The myth of the child molester as the dirty old man in the wrinkled raincoat is now being reevaluated, based on what we now know about the kinds of people who victimize children. The fact is a child molester can look like anyone else and even be someone we know and like.

There is another myth that is still with us and is far less likely to be discussed. This is the myth of the child victim as a completely innocent little girl walking down the street minding her own business. It may be more important to dispel this myth than the myth of the evil offender, especially when talking about the sexual exploitation of children and child sex rings. Child victims can be boys as well as girls, and not all victims are little "angels".

Society seems to have a problem dealing with any sexual abuse case in which the offender is not completely "bad" or the victim is not completely "good". Child victims who, for example, simply behave like human beings and respond to the attention and affection of offenders by voluntarily and repeatedly returning to the offender's home are troubling. It confuses us to see the victims in child pornography giggling or laughing. At professional conferences on child sexual abuse, child prostitution is almost never discussed. It is the form of sexual victimization of children most unlike the stereotype of the innocent girl victim. Child prostitutes, by definition, participate in and often initiate their victimization. Furthermore child prostitutes and the participants in child sex rings are frequently boys. One therapist recently told me that a researcher's data on child molestation were misleading because many of the child victims in question were child prostitutes. This implies that child prostitutes are not "real" child victims. In a survey by the *Los Angeles Times* , only 37 percent of those responding thought that child prostitution constituted child sexual abuse (Timnik, 1985). Whether or not it seems fair, when adults and children have sex, the child is always the victim.

**Intrafamilial Child Sexual Abuse.**

During the 1970s, primarily as a result of the women's movement, society began to learn more about the sexual victimization of children. We began to realize that most children are sexually molested by someone they know who is usually a relative - a father, step-father, uncle, grandfather, older brother, or even a female relative. Some mitigate the difficulty of accepting this by adopting the view that only members of socio-economic groups other than theirs engage in such behavior.

It quickly became apparent that warnings about not taking gifts from strangers were not good enough to prevent child sexual abuse. Consequently, we began to develop prevention programs based on more complex concepts, such as good touching and bad touching. the "yucky" feeling, and the child's right to say no. These are not the kinds of things you can easily and effectively communicate in fifty minutes to hundreds of kids packed into a school auditorium. These are very difficult issues, and programs must he carefully developed and evaluated.

In the late 1970s child sexual abuse became almost synonymous with incest, and incest meant father-daughter sexual relations. Therefore, the focus of child sexual abuse intervention became father-daughter incest. Even today, the vast majority of training materials, articles, and books on this topic refer to child sexual abuse only in terms of intrafamilial father-daughter incest.

Incest is, in fact, sexual relations between individuals of any age too closely related to marry. It need not necessarily involve an adult and a child, and it goes beyond child sexual abuse. But more importantly child sexual abuse goes beyond father-daughter incest. Intrafamilial incest between an adult and child may be the most common form of child sexual abuse, but it is not the only form.

The progress of the 1970s in recognizing that child sexual abuse was not simply a result of "stranger danger" was an important breakthrough in dealing with society's denial. The battle, however, is not over. The persistent voice of society luring us back to the more simple concept of "stranger danger" may never go away. It is the voice of denial.

**Return To "Stranger Danger".**

In the early 1980s the issue of missing children rose to prominence and was focused primarily on the stranger abduction of little children. Runaways, throwaways, noncustodial abductions, nonfamily abductions of teenagers - all major problems within the missing children's issue - were almost forgotten. People no longer wanted to hear about good touching and bad touching and the child's right to say "no". They wanted to be told, in thirty minutes or less, how they could protect their children from abduction by strangers. We were back to the horrible but simple and clear-cut concept of "stranger danger".

In the emotional zeal over the problem of missing children, isolated horror stories and distorted numbers were sometimes used. The American public was led to believe that most of the missing children had been kidnapped by pedophiles - a new term for child molesters. The media, profiteers, and well-intentioned zealots all played big roles in this hype and hysteria over missing children.

**The Acquaintance Molester.**

Only recently has society begun to deal openly with a critical piece in the puzzle of child sexual abuse - acquaintance molestation. This seems to be the most difficult aspect of the problem for us to face. People seem more willing to accept a father or stepfather, particularly one from another socio-economic group, as a child molester than a parish priest, a next-door neighbor, a police officer, a pediatrician, an FBI agent, or a Scout leader. The acquaintance molester, by definition, is one of us. These kinds of molesters have always existed, but our society has not been willing to accept that fact.

Sadly, one of the main reasons that the criminal justice system and the public were forced to confront the problem of acquaintance molestation was the preponderance of lawsuits arising from the negligence of many institutions.

One of the unfortunate outcomes of society's preference for the "stranger danger" concept is what I call "say no, yell, and tell" guilt. This is the result of prevention programs that tell potential child victims to avoid sexual abuse by saying no, yelling, and telling. This might work with the stranger hiding behind a tree. Adolescent boys seduced by a Scout leader or children who actively participate in their victimization often feel guilty and blame themselves because they did not do what they were "supposed" to do. They may feel a need to describe their victimization in more socially acceptable but sometimes inaccurate ways that relieve them of this guilt.

While American society has become increasingly more aware of the problem of the acquaintance molester and related problems such as child pornography, the voice calling us back to "stranger danger" still persists.

**Satanism: A New Form Of "Stranger Danger".**

In today's version of "stranger danger", it is the satanic devil worshipers who are snatching and victimizing the children. Many who warned us in the early 1980s about pedophiles snatching fifty thousand kids a year now contend they were wrong only about who was doing the kidnapping, not about the number abducted. This is again the desire for the simple and clear-cut explanation for a complex problem.

For those who know anything about criminology, one of the oldest theories of crime is demonology: The devil makes you do it. This makes it even easier to deal with the child molester who is the "pillar of the community". It is not his fault; it is not our fault. There is no way we could have known; the devil made him do it. This explanation has tremendous appeal because, like "stranger danger", it presents the clear-cut, black-and-white struggle between good and evil as the explanation for child abduction, exploitation, and abuse.

In regard to satanic "ritual" abuse, today we may not be where we were with incest in the 1960s, but where we were with missing children in the early 1980s. The best data now available (the 1990 *National Incidence Studies on Missing, Abducted, Runaway, and Thrownaway Children in America* ) estimate the number of stereotypical child abductions at between 200 and 300 a year, and the number of stranger abduction homicides of children at between 43 and 147 a year. Approximately half of the abducted children are teenagers. Today's facts are significantly different from yesterday's perceptions, and those who exaggerated the problem, however well-intentioned, have lost credibility and damaged the reality of the problem.

## Law Enforcement Training

The belief that there is a connection between satanism and crime is certainly not new. As previously stated, one of the oldest theories concerning the causes of crime is demonology. Fear of satanic or occult activity has peaked from time to time throughout history. Concern in the late 1970s focused primarily on "unexplained" deaths and mutilations of animals, and in recent years has focused on child sexual abuse and the alleged human sacrifice of missing children. In 1999 it will probably focus on the impending "end of the world".

Today satanism and a wide variety of other terms are used interchangeably in reference to certain crimes. This discussion will analyze the nature of "satanic, occult, ritualistic" crime primarily as it pertains to the abuse of children and focus on appropriate *law enforcement* responses to it.

Recently a flood of law enforcement seminars and conferences have dealt with satanic and ritualistic crime. These training conferences have various titles, such as "Occult in Crime", "Satanic Cults", 'Ritualistic Crime Seminar", "Satanic Influences in Homicide", "Occult Crimes, Satanism and Teen Suicide", and "Ritualistic Abuse of Children".

The typical conference runs from one to three days, and many of them include the same presenters and instructors. A wide variety of topics are usually discussed during this training either as individual presentations by different instructors or grouped together by one or more instructors. Typical topics covered include the following:

- Historical overview of satanism, witchcraft, and paganism from ancient to modern times.
- Nature and influence of fantasy role-playing games, such as "Dungeons and Dragons".
- Lyrics, symbolism, and influence of rock and roll, Heavy Metal, and Black Metal music.
- Teenage "stoner" gangs, their symbols, and their vandalism.
- Teenage suicide by adolescents dabbling in the occult.
- Crimes committed by self-styled satanic practitioners, including grave and church desecrations and robberies, animal mutilations, and even murders.
- Ritualistic abuse of children as part of bizarre ceremonies and human sacrifices.
- Organized, Traditional, or Multigenerational satanic groups involved in organized conspiracies, such as taking over day care centers, infiltrating police departments, and trafficking in human sacrifice victims.
- The "Big Conspiracy" theory, which implies that satanists are responsible for such things as Adolph Hitler, World War II, abortion, illegal drugs, pornography, Watergate, and Irangate, and have infiltrated the Department

of Justice, the Pentagon, and the White House.

During the conferences, these nine areas are linked together through the liberal use of the word "satanism" and some common symbolism (pentagrams, 666, demons, etc.). The implication often is that all are part of a continuum of behavior, a single problem or some common conspiracy. The distinctions among the different areas are blurred even if occasionally a presenter tries to make them. The information presented is a mixture of fact, theory, opinion, fantasy, and paranoia, and because some of it can be proven or corroborated (symbols on rock albums, graffiti on walls, desecration of cemeteries, vandalism, etc.), the implication is that it is all true and documented. Material produced by religious organizations, photocopies and slides of newspaper articles, and videotapes of tabloid television programs are used to supplement the training and are presented as "evidence" of the existence and nature of the problem.

All of this is complicated by the fact that almost any discussion of satanism and the occult is interpreted in the light of the religious beliefs of those in the audience. Faith, not logic and reason, governs the religious beliefs of most people. As a result, some normally skeptical law enforcement officers accept the information disseminated at these conferences without critically evaluating it or questioning the sources. Officers who do not normally depend on church groups for law enforcement criminal intelligence, who know that media accounts of their own cases are notoriously inaccurate, and who scoff at and joke about tabloid television accounts of bizarre behavior suddenly embrace such material when presented in the context of satanic activity. Individuals not in law enforcement seem even more likely to do so. Other disciplines, especially therapists, have also conducted training conferences on the characteristics and identification of "ritual" child abuse. Nothing said at such conferences will change the religious beliefs of those in attendance. Such conferences illustrate the highly emotional nature of and the ambiguity and wide variety of terms involved in this issue.

## Definitions

The words "satanic", "occult", and "ritual" are often used interchangeably. It is difficult to define "satanism" precisely. No attempt will be made to do so here However, it is important to realize that, for some people, any religious belief system other than their own is "satanic". The Ayatollah Khomeini and Saddam Hussein referred to the United States as the "Great Satan". In the British Parliament a Protestant leader called the Pope the Antichrist. In a book titled Prepare For War (1987), Rebecca Brown, M.D. has a chapter entitled "Is Roman Catholicism Witchcraft?" Dr. Brown also lists among the "doorways" to satanic power and/or demon infestation the following: fortune tellers, horoscopes, fraternity oaths, vegetarianism, yoga, self-hypnosis, relaxation tapes, acupuncture, biofeedback, fantasy role-playing games, adultery, homosexuality, pornography, judo, karate, and rock music. Dr. Brown states that rock music "was a carefully masterminded plan by none other than Satan himself" (p. 84). The ideas expressed in this book may seem extreme and even humorous. This book, however, has been recommended as a serious reference in law enforcement training material on this topic.

In books, lectures, handout material, and conversations, I have heard all of the following referred to as satanism:

- Church of Satan
- Ordo Templi Orientis
- Temple of Set
- Demonology
- Witchcraft
- Occult
- Paganism
- Santeria
- Voodoo
- Rosicrucians
- Freemasonry
- Knights Templar

- Stoner Gangs
- Heavy Metal Music
- Rock Music
- KKK
- Nazis
- Skinheads
- Scientology
- Unification Church
- The Way
- Hare Krishna
- Rajneesh
- Religious Cults
- New Age
- Astrology
- Channeling
- Transcendental Meditation
- Holistic Medicine
- Buddhism
- Hinduism
- Mormonism
- Islam
- Orthodox Church
- Roman Catholicism

At law enforcement training conferences, it is witchcraft, santeria, paganism, and the occult that are most often referred to as forms of satanism. It may be a matter of definition, but these things are not necessarily the same as traditional satanism. The worship of lunar goddesses and nature and the practice of fertility rituals are not satanism. Santeria is a combination of 17th century Roman Catholicism and African paganism.

Occult means simply "hidden". All unreported or unsolved crimes might be regarded as occult, but in this context the term refers to the action or influence of supernatural powers, some secret knowledge of them, or an interest in paranormal phenomena, and does not imply satanism, evil, wrongdoing, or crime. Indeed, historically, the principal crimes deserving of consideration as "occult crimes" are the frauds perpetrated by faith healers, fortune tellers and "psychics" who for a fee claim cures, arrange visitations with dead loved ones, and commit other financial crimes against the gullible.

Many individuals define satanism from a totally Christian perspective, using this word to describe the power of evil in the world. With this definition, any crimes, especially those which are particularly bizarre, repulsive, or cruel, can be viewed as satanic in nature. Yet it is just as difficult to precisely define satanism as it is to precisely define Christianity or any complex spiritual belief system.

**What Is Ritual?**

The biggest confusion is over the word "ritual". During training conferences on this topic, ritual almost always comes to mean "satanic" or at least "spiritual". "Ritual" can refer to a prescribed religious ceremony, but in its broader meaning refers to any customarily-repeated act or series of acts. The need to repeat these acts can be cultural, sexual, or psychological as well as spiritual.

Cultural rituals could include such things as what a family eats on Thanksgiving Day, or when and how presents are opened at Christmas. The initiation ceremonies of fraternities, sororities, gangs, and other social clubs are other examples of cultural rituals.

Since 1972 I have lectured about sexual ritual, which is nothing more than repeatedly engaging in an act or series of acts in a certain manner because of a *sexual* need. In order to become aroused and/or gratified, a person must engage in the act in a certain way. This sexual ritual can include such things as the physical characteristics, age, or gender of the victim, the particular sequence of acts, the bringing or taking of specific objects, and the use of certain words or phrases. This is more than the concept of M.O. (Method of Operation) known to most police officers. M.O. is something done by an offender because it works. Sexual ritual is something done by an offender because of a need. Deviant acts, such as urinating on, defecating on, or even eviscerating a victim, are far more likely to be the result of sexual ritual than religious or "satanic" ritual.

From a criminal investigative perspective, two other forms of ritualism must be recognized. The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-III-R) (APA, 1987) defines "Obsessive- Compulsive Disorder" as "repetitive, purposeful, and intentional behaviors that are performed in response to an obsession, or according to certain rules or in a stereotyped fashion" (p. 247). Such compulsive behavior frequently involves rituals. Although such behavior usually involves noncriminal activity such as excessive hand washing or checking that doors are locked, occasionally compulsive ritualism can be part of criminal activity. Certain gamblers or firesetters, for example, are thought by some authorities to be motivated in part through such compulsions. Ritual can also stem from psychotic hallucinations and delusions. A crime can be committed in a precise manner because a voice told the offender to do it that way or because a divine mission required it.

To make this more confusing, cultural, religious, sexual, and psychological ritual can overlap. Some psychotic people are preoccupied with religious delusions and hear the voice of God or Satan telling them to do things of a religious nature. Offenders who feel little, if any, guilt over their crimes may need little justification for their antisocial behavior. As human beings, however, they may have fears, concerns, and anxiety over getting away with their criminal acts. It is difficult to pray to God for success in doing things that are against His Commandments. A negative spiritual belief system may fulfill their human need for assistance from and belief in a greater power or to deal with their superstitions. Compulsive ritualism (e.g., excessive cleanliness or fear of disease) can be introduced into sexual behavior. Even many "normal" people have a need for order and predictability and therefore may engage in family or work rituals. Under stress or in times of change, this need for order and ritual may increase.

Ritual crime may fulfill the cultural, spiritual, sexual, and psychological needs of an offender. Crimes may be ritualistically motivated or may have ritualistic elements. The ritual behavior may also fulfill basic criminal needs to manipulate victims, get rid of rivals, send a message to enemies, and intimidate co-conspirators. The leaders of a group may want to play upon the beliefs and superstitions of those around them and try to convince accomplices and enemies that they, the leaders, have special or "supernatural" powers.

The important point for the criminal investigator is to realize that most ritualistic criminal behavior is not motivated simply by satanic or any religious ceremonies. At some conferences, presenters have attempted to make an issue of distinguishing between "ritual", "ritualized", and "ritualistic" abuse of children. These subtle distinctions, however, seem to be of no significant value to the criminal investigator.

**What Is "Ritual" Child Abuse?**

I cannot define "ritual child abuse" precisely and prefer not to use the term. I am frequently forced to use it (as throughout this discussion) so that people will have some idea what I am discussing. Use of the term, however, is confusing, misleading, and counterproductive. The newer term "satanic ritual abuse" (abbreviated "SRA") is even worse. Certain observations, however, are important for investigative understanding.

Most people today use the term to refer to abuse of children that is part of some evil spiritual belief system, which almost by definition must be satanic.

Dr. Lawrence Pazder, coauthor of Michelle Remembers , defines "ritualized abuse of children" as "repeated physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual assaults combined with a systematic use of symbols and secret ceremonies designed to turn a child against itself, family, society, and God" (presentation, Richmond, Va., May 7,1987). He also

states that "the sexual assault has ritualistic meaning and is not for sexual gratification".

This definition may have value for academics, sociologists, and therapists, but it creates potential problems for law enforcement. Certain acts engaged in with children (i.e. kissing, touching, appearing naked, etc.) may be criminal if performed for sexual gratification. If the ritualistic acts were in fact performed for spiritual indoctrination, potential prosecution can be jeopardized, particularly if the acts can be defended as constitutionally protected religious expression. The mutilation of a baby's genitals for sadistic sexual pleasure is a crime. The circumcision of a baby's genitals for religious reasons is most likely *not* a crime. The intent of the acts is important for criminal prosecution.

Not all spiritually motivated ritualistic activity is satanic. Santeria, witchcraft, voodoo, and most religious cults are not satanism. In fact, most spiritually- or religiously-based abuse of children has nothing to do with satanism. Most child abuse that could be termed "ritualistic" by various definitions is more likely to be physical and psychological rather than sexual in nature. If a distinction needs to be made between satanic and nonsatanic child abuse, the indicators for that distinction must be related to specific satanic symbols, artifacts, or doctrine rather than the mere presence of any ritualistic element.

Not all such ritualistic activity with a child is a crime. Almost all parents with religious beliefs indoctrinate their children into that belief system. Is male circumcision for religious reasons child abuse? Is the religious circumcision of females child abuse? Does having a child kneel on a hard floor reciting the rosary constitute child abuse? Does having a child chant a satanic prayer or attend a black mass constitute child abuse? Does a religious belief in corporal punishment constitute child abuse? Does group care of children in a commune or cult constitute child abuse? Does the fact that any acts in question were performed with parental permission affect the nature of the crime? Many ritualistic acts, whether satanic or not, are simply not crimes. To open the Pandora's box of labeling child abuse as "ritualistic" simply because it involves a spiritual belief system means to apply the definition to all acts by all spiritual belief systems. The day may come when many in the forefront of concern about ritual abuse will regret they opened the box.

When a victim describes and investigation corroborates what sounds like ritualistic activity. several possibilities must be considered. The ritualistic activity may be part of the excessive religiosity of mentally disturbed, even psychotic offenders. It may be a misunderstood part of sexual ritual. The ritualistic activity may be incidental to any real abuse. The offender may be involved in ritualistic activity with a child and also may be abusing a child, but one may have little or nothing to do with the other.

The offender may be deliberately engaging in ritualistic activity with a child as part of child abuse and exploitation. The motivation, however, may be not to indoctrinate the child into a belief system, but to lower the inhibitions of, control, manipulate, and/or confuse the child. In all the turmoil over this issue, it would be very effective strategy for any child molester deliberately to introduce ritualistic elements into his crime in order to confuse the child and therefore the criminal justice system. This would, however, make the activity M.O. and not ritual.

The ritualistic activity and the child abuse may be integral parts of some spiritual belief system. In that case the greatest risk is to the children of the practitioners. But this is true of all cults and religions, not just satanic cults. A high potential of abuse exists for any children raised in a group isolated from the mainstream of society, especially if the group has a charismatic leader whose orders are unquestioned and blindly obeyed by the members. Sex, money, and power are often the main motivations of the leaders of such cults.

**What Makes A Crime Satanic, Occult, Or Ritualistic?**

Some would answer that it is the offender's spiritual beliefs or membership in a cult or church. If that is the criterion, why not label the crimes committed by Protestants, Catholics, and Jews in the same way? Are the atrocities of Jim Jones in Guyana Christian crimes?

Some would answer that it is the presence of certain symbols in the possession or home of the perpetrator. What does it mean then to find a crucifix, Bible, or rosary in the possession or home of a bank robber, embezzler, child molester, or murderer? If different criminals possess the same symbols, are they necessarily part of one big conspiracy?

Others would answer that it is the presence of certain symbols such as pentagrams, inverted crosses, and 666 at the crime scene. What does it mean then to find a cross spray painted on a wall or carved into the body of a victim? What does it mean for a perpetrator, as in one recent case profiled by my Unit, to leave a Bible tied to his murder victim? What about the possibility that an offender deliberately left such symbols to make it look like a "satanic" crime?

Some would argue that it is the bizarreness or cruelness of the crime: body mutilation, amputation, drinking of blood, eating of flesh, use of urine or feces. Does this mean that all individuals involved in lust murder, sadism, vampirism, cannibalism, urophilia, and coprophilia are satanists or occult practitioners? What does this say about the bizarre crimes of psychotic killers such as Ed Gein or Richard Trenton Chase, both of whom mutilated their victims as part of their psychotic delusions? Can a crime that is not sexually deviant, bizarre, or exceptionally violent be satanic? Can white collar crime be satanic?

A few might even answer that it is the fact that the crime was committed on a date with satanic or occult significance (Halloween, May Eve, etc.) or the fact that the perpetrator claims that Satan told him to commit the crime. What does this mean for crimes committed on Thanksgiving or Christmas? What does this say about crimes committed by perpetrators who claim that God or Jesus told them to do it? One note of interest is the fact that in handout and reference material I have collected, the number of dates with satanic or occult significance ranges from 8 to 110. This is compounded by the fact that it is sometimes stated that satanists can celebrate these holidays on several days on either side of the official date or that the birthdays of practitioners can also be holidays. The exact names and exact dates of the holidays and the meaning of symbols listed may also vary depending on who prepared the material The handout material is often distributed without identifying the author or documenting the original source of the information. It is then frequently photocopied by attendees and passed on to other police officers with no one really knowing its validity or origin.

Most, however, would probably answer that what makes a crime satanic, occult, or ritualistic is the motivation for the crime. It is a crime that is spiritually motivated by a religious belief system. How then do we label the following true crimes?

- Parents defy a court order and send their children to an unlicensed Christian school.
- Parents refuse to send their children to any school because they are waiting for the second coming of Christ.
- Parents beat their child to death because he or she will not follow their Christian belief.
- Parents violate child labor laws because they believe the Bible requires such work.
- Individuals bomb an abortion clinic or kidnap the doctor because their religious belief system says abortion is murder.
- A child molester reads the Bible to his victims in order to justify his sex acts with them.
- Parents refuse life-saving medical treatment for a child because of their religious beliefs.
- Parents starve and beat their child to death because their minister said the child was possessed by demonic spirits.

Some people would argue that the Christians who committed the above crimes misunderstood and distorted their religion while satanists who commit crimes are following theirs. But who decides what constitutes a misinterpretation of a religious belief system? The individuals who committed the above-described crimes, however misguided, believed that they were following their religion as they understood it. Religion was and is used to justify such social behavior as the Crusades, the Inquisition, Apartheid, segregation, and recent violence in Northern Ireland, India, Lebanon and Nigeria.

Who decides exactly what "satanists" believe? In this country, we cannot even agree on what Christians believe. At many law enforcement conferences The *Satanic Bible* is used for this, and it is often contrasted or compared with the Judeo-Christian Bible. The *Satanic Bible* is, in essence, a short paperback book written by one man, Anton LaVey, in 1969. To compare it to a book written by multiple authors over a period of thousands of years is ridiculous, even ignoring the possibility of Divine revelation in the Bible. What satanists believe certainly isn't limited to other people's interpretation of a few books. More importantly it is subject to some degree of interpretation by individual believers just as Christianity is. Many admitted "satanists" claim they do not even believe in God, the devil, or any supreme deity. The criminal behavior of one person claiming belief in a religion does not necessarily imply guilt or blame to others sharing that belief. In addition, simply claiming membership in a religion does not necessarily make you a member.

The fact is that far more crime and child abuse has been committed by zealots in the name of God, Jesus, Mohammed, and other mainstream religion than has ever been committed in the name of Satan. Many people, including myself, don't like that statement, but the truth of it is undeniable.

Although defining a crime as satanic, occult, or ritualistic would probably involve a combination of the criteria set forth above, I have been unable to clearly define such a crime. Each potential definition presents a different set of problems when measured against an objective, rational, and constitutional perspective. In a crime with multiple subjects, each offender may have a different motivation for the same crime. Whose motivation determines the label for the crime? It is difficult to count or track something you cannot even define.

I have discovered, however, that the facts of so-called "satanic crimes" are often significantly different from what is described st training conferences or in the media. The actual involvement of satanism or the occult in these cases usually turns out to be secondary, insignificant, or nonexistent. Occult or ritual crime surveys done by the states of Michigan (1990) and Virginia (1991) have only confirmed this "discovery". Some law enforcement officers, unable to find serious "satanic" crime in their communities, assume they are just lucky or vigilant and the serious problems must be in other jurisdictions. The officers in the other jurisdictions, also unable find it, assume the same.

## Multi-dimensional Child Sex Rings

Sometime in early 1983 I was first contacted by a law enforcement agency for guidance in what was then thought to be an unusual case. The exact date of the contact is unknown because its significance was not recognized at the time. In the months and years that followed, I received more and more inquiries about "these kinds of cases". The requests for assistance came (and continue to come) from all over the United States. Many of the aspects of these cases varied, but there were also some commonalties. Early on, however, one particularly difficult and potentially significant issue began to emerge.

These cases involved and continue to involve unsubstantiated allegations of bizarre activity that are difficult either to prove or disprove. Many of the unsubstantiated allegations, however, do not seem to have occurred or even be possible. These cases seem to call into question the credibility of victims of child sexual abuse and exploitation. These are the most polarizing, frustrating, and baffling cases I have encountered in more than 18 years of studying the criminal aspects of deviant sexual behavior. I privately sought answers, but said nothing publicly about those cases until 1985.

In October 1984 the problems in investigating and prosecuting one of these cases in Jordan, Minnesota became publicly known. In February 1985, at the FBI Academy, the FBI sponsored and I coordinated the first national seminar held to study "these kinds of cases". Later in 1985, similar conferences sponsored by other organizations were held in Washington, D.C.; Sacramento, California; and Chicago, Illinois. These cases have also been discussed at many recent regional and national conferences dealing with the sexual victimization of children and Multiple Personality Disorder. Few answers have come from these conferences. I continue to be contacted on these cases on a regular basis. Inquiries have been received from law enforcement officers, prosecutors, therapists, victims, families of victims, and the media from all over the United States and now foreign countries. I do not claim to

understand completely all the dynamics of these cases. I continue to keep an open mind and to search for answers to the questions and solutions to the problems they pose. This discussion is based on my analysis of the several hundred of "these kinds of cases" on which I have consulted since 1983.

## Dynamics Of Cases.

What are "these kinds of cases"? They were and continue to be difficult to define. They all involve allegations of what sounds like child sexual abuse, but with a combination of some atypical dynamics. These cases seem to have the following four dynamics in common: (1) multiple young victims, (2) multiple offenders, (3) fear as the controlling tactic, and (4) bizarre or ritualistic activity.

### Multiple Young Victims.

In almost all the cases the sexual abuse was alleged to have taken place or at least begun when the victims were between the ages of birth and six. This very young age may be an important key to understanding these cases. In addition the victims all described multiple children being abused. The numbers ranged from three or four to as many as several hundred victims.

### Multiple Offenders.

In almost all the cases the victims reported numerous offenders. The numbers ranged from two or three all the way up to dozens of offenders. In one recent case the victims alleged 400-500 offenders were involved. Interestingly many of the offenders (perhaps as many as 40-50 percent) were reported to be females. The multiple offenders were often family members and were described as being part of a cult, occult, or satanic group.

### Fear As Controlling Tactic.

Child molesters in general are able to maintain control and ensure the secrecy of their victims in a variety of ways. These include attention and affection, coercion, blackmail, embarrassment, threats, and violence. In almost all of these cases I have studied, the victims described being frightened and reported threats against themselves, their families, their friends, and even their pets. They reported witnessing acts of violence perpetrated to reinforce this fear. It is my belief that this fear and the traumatic memory of the events may be another key to understanding many of these cases.

### Bizarre Or Ritualistic Activity.

This is the most difficult dynamic of these cases to describe. "Bizarre" is a relative term. Is the use of urine or feces in sexual activity bizarre, or is it a well-documented aspect of sexual deviancy, or is it part of established satanic rituals? As previously discussed, the ritualistic aspect is even more difficult to define. How do you distinguish acts performed in a precise manner to enhance or allow sexual arousal from those acts that fulfill spiritual needs or comply with "religious" ceremonies? Victims in these cases report ceremonies, chanting, robes and costumes, drugs, use of urine and feces, animal sacrifice, torture, abduction, mutilation, murder, and even cannibalism and vampirism. All things considered, the word "bizarre" is probably preferable to the word "ritual" to describe this activity.

When I was contacted on these cases, it was very common for a prosecutor or investigator to say that the alleged victims have been evaluated by an "expert" who will stake his or her professional reputation on the fact that the victims are telling the "truth". When asked how many cases this expert had previously evaluated involving these four dynamics, the answer was always the same: none! The experts usually had only dealt with one-on-one intrafamilial sexual abuse cases. Recently an even more disturbing trend has developed. More and more of the victims have been identified or evaluated by experts who have been trained to identify and specialize in satanic ritual abuse.

## Characteristics Of Multidimensional Child Sex Rings.

As previously stated, a major problem in communicating, training, and researching in this area is the term used to define "these kinds of cases". Many refer to them as "ritual, ritualistic, or ritualized abuse of children cases" or "satanic ritual abuse (SRA) cases". Such words carry specialized meanings for many people and might imply that all

these cases are connected to occult or satanic activity. If ritual abuse is not necessarily occult or satanic, but is "merely" severe, repeated, prolonged abuse, why use a term that, in the minds of so many, implies such specific motivation?

Others refer to these cases as "multioffender/multivictim cases". The problem with this term is that most multiple offender and victim cases do not involve the four dynamics discussed above.

For want of a better term, I have decided to refer to "these kinds of cases" as "multidimensional child sex rings". Right now I seem to be the only one using this term. I am, however, not sure if this is truly a distinct kind of child sex ring case or just a case not properly handled. Following are the general characteristics of these multidimensional child sex ring cases as contrasted with more common historical child sex ring cases [see my monograph *Child Sex Rings: A Behavioral Analysis* (1989) for a discussion of the characteristics of historical child sex ring cases].

**Female Offenders.**

As many as 40-50 percent of the offenders in these cases are reported to be women. This is in marked contrast to historical child sex rings in which almost all the offenders are men.

**Situational Molesters.**

The offenders appear to be sexually interacting with the child victims for reasons other than a true sexual preference for children. The children are substitute victims, and the abusive activity may have little to do with pedophilia [see my monograph *Child Molesters: A Behavioral Analysis* (1987) for a further explanation about types of molesters].

**Male And Female Victims.**

Both boys and girls appear to be targeted, but with an apparent preference for girls. Almost all the adult survivors are female, but day care cases frequently involve male as well as female victims. The most striking characteristic of the victims, however, is their young age (generally birth to six years old when the abuse began).

**Multidimensional Motivation.**

Sexual gratification appears to be only part of the motivation for the "sexual" activity. Many people today argue that the motivation is "spiritual" - possibly part of an occult ceremony. It is my opinion that the motivation may have more to do with anger, hostility, rage and resentment carried out against weak and vulnerable victims. Much of the ritualistic abuse of children may not be sexual in nature. Some of the activity may, in fact, be physical abuse directed at sexually-significant body parts (penis, anus, nipples). This may also partially explain the large percentage of female offenders. Physical abuse of children by females is well- documented.

**Pornography And Paraphernalia.**

Although many of the victims of multidimensional child sex rings claim that pictures and videotapes of the activity were made, no such visual record has been found by law enforcement. In recent years, American law enforcement has seized large amounts of child pornography portraying children in a wide variety of sexual activity and perversions. None of it, however, portrays the kind of bizarre and/or ritualistic activity described by these victims. Perhaps these offenders use and store their pornography and paraphernalia in ways different from preferential child molesters (pedophiles). This is an area needing additional research and investigation.

**Control Through Fear.**

Control through fear may be the overriding characteristic of these cases. Control is maintained by frightening the children. A very young child might not be able to understand the significance of much of the sexual activity but certainly understands fear. The stories that the victims tell may be their perceived versions of severe traumatic memories. They may be the victims of a severely traumatized childhood in which being sexually abused was just one of the many negative events affecting their lives.

**Scenarios.**

Multidimensional child sex rings typically emerge from one of four scenarios: (1) adult survivors, (2) day care cases, (3) family/isolated neighborhood cases, and (4) custody/visitation disputes.

**Adult Survivors.**

In adult survivor cases, adults of almost any age - nearly always women - are suffering the consequences of a variety of personal problems and failures in their lives (e.g., promiscuity, eating disorders, drug and alcohol abuse, failed relationships, self- mutilation, unemployment). As a result of some precipitating stress or crisis, they often seek therapy. They are frequently hypnotized, intentionally or unintentionally, as part of the therapy and are often diagnosed as suffering from Multiple Personality Disorder. Gradually, during the therapy, the adults reveal previously unrecalled memories of early childhood victimization that includes multiple victims and offenders, fear as the controlling tactic, and bizarre or ritualistic activity. Adult survivors may also claim that "cues" from certain events in their recent life "triggered" the previously repressed memories.

The multiple offenders are often described as members of a cult or satanic group. Parents, family members, clergy, civic leaders, police officers (or individuals wearing police uniforms), and other prominent members of society are frequently described as present at and participating in the exploitation. The alleged bizarre activity often includes insertion of foreign objects, witnessing mutilations, and sexual acts and murders being filmed or photographed. The offenders may allegedly still be harassing or threatening the victims. They report being particularly frightened on certain dates and by certain situations. In several of these cases, women (called "breeders") claim to have had babies that were turned over for human sacrifice. This type of case is probably best typified by books like *Michelle Remembers* (Smith & Pazder, 1980), *Satan's Underground* (Stratford, 1988), and *Satan's Children* (Mayer, 1991).

If and when therapists come to believe the patient or decide the law requires it, the police or FBI are sometimes contacted to conduct an investigation. The therapists may also fear for their safety because they now know the "secret". The therapists will frequently tell law enforcement that they will stake their professional reputation on the fact that their patient is telling the truth. Some adult survivors go directly to law enforcement. They may also go from place to place in an effort to find therapists or investigators who will listen to and believe them. Their ability to provide verifiable details varies and many were raised in apparently religious homes. A few adult survivors are now reporting participation in specific murders or child abductions that are known to have taken place.

**Day Care Cases.**

In day care cases children currently or formerly attending a day care center gradually describe their victimization at the center and at other locations to which they were taken by the day care staff. The cases include multiple victims and offenders, fear, and bizarre or ritualistic activity, with a particularly high number of female offenders. Descriptions of strange games, insertion of foreign objects, killing of animals, photographing of activities, and wearing of costumes are common. The accounts of the young children, however, do not seem to be quite as "bizarre" as those of the adult survivors, with fewer accounts of human sacrifice.

**Family/Isolated Neighborhood Cases.**

In family/isolated neighborhood cases, children describe their victimization within their family or extended family. The group is often defined by geographic boundary, such as a cul-de-sac, apartment building, or isolated rural setting. Such accounts are most common in rural or suburban communities with high concentrations of religiously conservative people. The stories are similar to those told of the day care setting, but with more male offenders. The basic dynamics remain the same, but victims tend to be more than six years of age, and the scenario may also involve a custody or visitation dispute.

**Custody/Visitation Dispute.**

In custody/visitation dispute cases, the allegations emanate from a custody or visitation dispute over at least one child under the age of seven. The four dynamics described above make these cases extremely difficult to handle. When complicated by the strong emotions of this scenario, the cases can be overwhelming. This is especially true if the disclosing child victims have been taken into the "underground" by a parent during the custody or visitation

dispute. Some of these parents or relatives may even provide authorities with diaries or tapes of their interviews with the children. An accurate evaluation and assessment of a young child held in isolation in this underground while being "debriefed" by a parent or someone else is almost impossible. However well- intentioned, these self-appointed investigators severely damage any chance to validate these cases objectively.

**Why Are Victims Alleging Things That Do Not Seem To Be True?**

Some of what the victims in these cases allege is physically impossible (victim cut up and put back together, offender took the building apart and then rebuilt it); some is possible but improbable (human sacrifice, cannibalism, vampirism ); some is possible and probable (child pornography, clever manipulation of victims); and some is corroborated (medical evidence of vaginal or anal trauma, offender confessions).

The most significant crimes being alleged that do not *seem* to be true are the human sacrifice and cannibalism by organized satanic cults. In none of the multidimensional child sex ring cases of which I am aware have bodies of the murder victims been found - in spite of major excavations where the abuse victims claim the bodies were located. The alleged explanations for this include: the offenders moved the bodies after the children left, the bodies were burned in portable high-temperature ovens, the bodies were put in double- decker graves under legitimately buried bodies, a mortician member of the cult disposed of the bodies in a crematorium, the offenders ate the bodies, the offenders used corpses and aborted fetuses, or the power of Satan caused the bodies to disappear.

Not only are no bodies found, but also, more importantly, there is no physical evidence that a murder took place. Many of those not in law enforcement do not understand that, while it is possible to get rid of a body, it is even more difficult to get rid of the physical evidence that a murder took place, especially a human sacrifice involving sex, blood, and mutilation. Such activity would leave behind trace evidence that could be found using modern crime scene processing techniques in spite of extraordinary efforts to clean it up.

The victims of these human sacrifices and murders are alleged to be abducted missing children, runaway and throwaway children, derelicts, and the babies of breeder women. It is interesting to note that many of those espousing these theories are using the long- since-discredited numbers and rhetoric of the missing children hysteria in the early 1980s. Yet "Stranger-Abduction Homicides of Children", a January 1989 *Juvenile Justice Bulletin* , published by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention of the U.S. Department of Justice, reports that researchers now estimate that the number of children kidnapped and murdered by nonfamily members is between 52 and 158 a year and that adolescents 14 to 17 years old account for nearly two-thirds of these victims. These figures are also consistent with the 1990 National Incident Studies previously mentioned.

We live in a very violent society, and yet we have "only" about 23,000 murders a year. Those who accept these stories of mass human sacrifice would have us believe that the satanists and other occult practitioners are murdering more than twice as many people every year in this country as all the other murderers combined.

In addition, in none of the cases of which I am aware has any evidence of a well-organized satanic cult been found. Many of those who accept the stories of organized ritual abuse of children and human sacrifice will tell you that the best evidence they now have is the consistency of stories from all over America. It sounds like a powerful argument. It is interesting to note that, without having met each other, the hundreds of people who claim to have been abducted by aliens from outer space also tell stories and give descriptions of the aliens that are similar to each other. This is not to imply that allegations of child abuse are in the same category as allegations of abduction by aliens from outer space. It is intended only to illustrate that individuals who never met each other can sometimes describe similar events without necessarily having experienced them.

The large number of people telling the same story is, in fact, the biggest reason to doubt these stories. It is simply too difficult for that many people to commit so many horrendous crimes as part of an organized conspiracy. Two or three people murder a couple of children in a few communities as part of a ritual, and nobody finds out? Possible. Thousands of people do the same thing to tens of thousands of victims over many years? Not likely. Hundreds of communities all over America are run by mayors, police departments, and community leaders who are practicing

satanists and who regularly murder and eat people? Not likely. In addition, these community leaders and high-ranking officials also supposedly commit these complex crimes leaving no evidence, and at the same time function as leaders and managers while heavily involved in using illegal drugs. Probably the closest documented example of this type of alleged activity in American history is the Ku Klux Klan, which ironically used Christianity, not satanism, to rationalize its activity but which, as might be expected, was eventually infiltrated by informants and betrayed by its members.

As stated, initially I was inclined to believe the allegations of the victims. But as the cases poured in and the months and years went by, I became more concerned about the lack of physical evidence and corroboration for many of the more serious allegations. With increasing frequency I began to ask the question: "Why are victims alleging things that do not *seem* to be true?" Many possible answers were considered.

The first possible answer is obvious: clever offenders. The allegations may not seem to be true but they are true. The criminal justice system lacks the knowledge, skill, and motivation to get to the bottom of this crime conspiracy. The perpetrators of this crime conspiracy are clever, cunning individuals using sophisticated mind control and brainwashing techniques to control their victims. Law enforcement does not know how to investigate these cases.

It is technically possible that these allegations of an organized conspiracy involving taking over day care centers, abduction, cannibalism, murder, and human sacrifice might be true. But if they are true, they constitute one of the greatest crime conspiracies in history.

Many people do not understand how difficult it is to commit a conspiracy crime involving numerous co-conspirators. One clever and cunning individual has a good chance of getting away with a well- planned interpersonal crime. Bring one partner into the crime and the odds of getting away with it drop considerably. The more people involved in the crime, the harder it is to get away with it. Why? Human nature is the answer. People get angry and jealous. They come to resent the fact that another conspirator is getting "more" than they. They get in trouble and want to make a deal for themselves by informing on others.

If a group of individuals degenerate to the point of engaging in human sacrifice, murder, and cannibalism, that would most likely be the beginning of the end for such a group. The odds are that someone in the group would have a problem with such acts and be unable to maintain the secret.

The appeal of the satanic conspiracy theory is twofold:

1. First, it is a simple explanation for a complex problem. Nothing is more simple than "the devil made them do it". If we do not understand something, we make it the work of some supernatural force. During the Middle Ages, serial killers were thought to be vampires and werewolves, and child sexual abuse was the work of demons taking the form of parents and clergy. Even today, especially for those raised to religiously believe so, satanism offers an explanation as to why "good" people do bad things. It may also help to "explain" unusual, bizarre, and compulsive sexual urges and behavior.
2. Second, the conspiracy theory is a popular one. We find it difficult to believe that one bizarre individual could commit a crime we find so offensive. Conspiracy theories about soldiers missing in action (MIAs), abductions by UFOs, Elvis Presley sightings, and the assassination of prominent public figures are the focus of much attention in this country. These conspiracy theories and allegations of ritual abuse have the following in common: (1) self-proclaimed experts, (2) tabloid media interest, (3) belief the government is involved in a coverup, and (4) emotionally involved direct and indirect victim/witnesses.

On a recent television program commemorating the one hundredth anniversary of Jack the Ripper, almost fifty percent of the viewing audience who called the polling telephone numbers indicated that they thought the murders were committed as part of a conspiracy involving the British Royal Family. The five experts on the program, however, unanimously agreed the crimes were the work of one disorganized but lucky individual who was diagnosed as a paranoid schizophrenic. In many ways, the murders of Jack the Ripper are similar to those allegedly committed by satanists today.

If your child's molestation was perpetrated by a sophisticated satanic cult, there is nothing you could have done to prevent it and therefore no reason to feel any guilt. I have been present when parents who believe their children were ritually abused at day care centers have told others that the cults had sensors in the road, lookouts in the air, and informers everywhere; therefore, the usually recommended advice of unannounced visits to the day care center would be impossible.

## Alternative Explanations

Even if only part of an allegation is not true, what then is the answer to the question "Why are victims alleging things that do not *seem* to be true?" After consulting with psychiatrists, psychologists, anthropologists, therapists, social workers, child sexual abuse experts, and law enforcement investigators for more than eight years, I can find no single, simple answer. The answer to the question seems to be a complex set of dynamics that can be different in each case. In spite of the fact that some skeptics keep looking for it, there does not appear to be one answer to the question that fits every case. Each case is different, and each case may involve a different combination of answers.

I have identified a series of possible alternative answers to this question. The alternative answers also do not preclude the possibility that clever offenders are sometimes involved. I will not attempt to explain completely these alternative answers because I cannot. They are presented simply as areas for consideration and evaluation by child sexual abuse intervenors, for further elaboration by experts in these fields, and for research by objective social scientists. The first step, however, in finding the answers to this question is to admit the possibility that some of what the victims describe may not have happened. Some child advocates seem unwilling to do this.

**Pathological Distortion.**

The first possible answer to why victims are alleging things that do not *seem* to be true is *pathological distortion*. The allegations may be errors in processing reality influenced by underlying mental disorders such as dissociative disorders, borderline or histrionic personality disorders, or psychosis. These distortions may be manifested in false accounts of victimization in order to gain psychological benefits such as attention and sympathy (factitious disorder). When such individuals repeatedly go from place to place or person to person making these false reports of their own "victimization", it is called Munchausen Syndrome. When the repealed false reports concern the "victimization" of their children or others linked to them, it is called Munchausen Syndrome by Proxy. I am amazed when some therapists state that they believe the allegations because they cannot think of a reason why the "victim", whose failures are now explained and excused or who is now the center of attention at a conference or on a national television program, would lie. If you can be forgiven for mutilating and killing babies, you can be forgiven for anything.

Many "victims" may develop pseudomemories of their victimization and eventually come to believe the events actually occurred. Noted forensic psychiatrist Park E. Dietz (personal communication, Nov. 1991) states:

"Pseudomemories have been acquired through dreams (particularly if one is encouraged to keep a journal or dream diary and to regard dream content as 'clues' about the past or as snippets of history), substance-induced altered states of consciousness (alcohol or other drugs), group influence (particularly hearing vivid accounts of events occurring to others with whom one identifies emotionally such as occurs in incest survivor groups), reading vivid accounts of events occurring to others with whom one identifies emotionally, watching such accounts in films or on television, and hypnosis. The most efficient means of inducing pseudomemories is hypnosis.

"It is characteristic of pseudomemories that the recollections of complex events (as opposed to a simple unit of information, such as a tag number) are incomplete and without chronological sequence. Often the person reports some uncertainty because the pseudomemories are experienced in a manner they describe as 'hazy', 'fuzzy', or 'vague'. They are often perplexed that they recall some details vividly but others dimly.

"Pseudomemories are not delusions. When first telling others of pseudomemories, these individuals do not have the unshakable but irrational conviction that deluded subjects have, but with social support they often come to defend vigorously the truthfulness of the pseudomemories.

"Pseudomemories are not fantasies, but may incorporate elements from fantasies experienced in the past. Even where the events described are implausible, listeners may believe them because they are reported with such intense affect (i.e. with so much emotion attached to the story) that the listener concludes that the events must have happened because no one could 'fake' the emotional aspects of the retelling. It also occurs, however, that persons report pseudomemories in such a matter-of-fact and emotionless manner that mental health professionals conclude that the person has 'dissociated' intellectual knowledge of the events from emotional appreciation of their impact."

**Traumatic Memory.**

The second possible answer is *traumatic memory*. Fear and severe trauma can cause victims to distort reality and confuse events. This is a well-documented fact in cases involving individuals taken hostage or in life-and-death situations. The distortions may be part of an elaborate defense mechanism of the mind called "splitting" - The victims create a clear-cut good-and-evil manifestation of their complex victimization that is then psychologically more manageable.

Through the defense mechanism of dissociation, the victim may escape the horrors of reality by inaccurately processing that reality. In a dissociative state a young child who ordinarily would know the difference might misinterpret a film or video as reality.

Another defense mechanism may tell the victim that it could have been worse, and so his or her victimization was not so bad. They are not alone in their victimization - other children were also abused. Their father who abused them is no different from other prominent people in the community they claim also abused them. Satanism may help to explain why their outwardly good and religious parents did such terrible things to them in the privacy of their home. Their religious training may convince them that such unspeakable acts by supposedly "good" people must be the work of the devil. The described human sacrifice may be symbolic of the "death" of their childhood.

It may be that we should anticipate that individuals severely abused as very young children by *multiple* offenders with *fear* as the primary controlling tactic will distort and embellish their victimization. Perhaps a horror-filled yet inaccurate account of victimization is not only not a counterindication of abuse, but is in fact a corroborative indicator of extreme physical, psychological, and/or sexual abuse. I do not believe it is a coincidence nor the result of deliberate planning by satanists that in almost all the cases of ritual abuse that have come to my attention, the abuse is alleged to have begun prior to the age of seven and perpetrated by multiple offenders. It may well be that such abuse, at young age by multiple offenders, is the most difficult to accurately recall with the specific and precise detail needed by the criminal justice system, and the most likely to be distorted and exaggerated when it is recalled. In her book *Too Scared to Cry* (1990), child psychiatrist Lenore Terr, a leading expert on psychic trauma in childhood, states "that a series of early childhood shocks might not be fully and accurately 'reconstructed' from the dreams and behaviors of the adult" (p. 5).

**Normal Childhood Fears And Fantasy.**

The third possible answer may be *normal childhood fears and fantasy*. Most young children are afraid of ghosts and monsters. Even as adults, many people feel uncomfortable, for example, about dangling their arms over the side of their bed. They still remember the "monster" under the bed from childhood. While young children may rarely invent stories about sexual activity, they might describe their victimization in terms of evil as they understand it. In church or at home, children may be told of satanic activity as the source of evil. The children may be "dumping" all their fears and worries unto an attentive and encouraging listener.

Children do fantasize. Perhaps whatever causes a child to allege something impossible (such as being cut up and put back together) is similar to what causes a child to allege something possible but improbable (such as witnessing another child being chopped up and eaten).

**Misperception, Confusion, And Trickery.**

Misperception, confusion, and trickery may be a fourth answer. Expecting young children to give accurate accounts of sexual activity for which they have little frame of reference is unreasonable. The Broadway play *Madame Butterfly* is the true story of a man who had a 15-year affair, including the "birth" of a baby, with a "woman" who turns out to have been a man all along. If a grown man does not know when he has had vaginal intercourse with a woman, how can we expect young children not to be confused?

Furthermore some clever offenders may deliberately introduce elements of satanism and the occult into the sexual exploitation simply to confuse or intimidate the victims. Simple magic and other techniques may be used to trick the children. Drugs may also be deliberately used to confuse the victims and distort their perceptions. Such acts would then be M.O., not ritual.

As previously stated, the perceptions of young victims may also be influenced by any trauma being experienced. This is the most popular alternative explanation, and even the more zealous believers of ritual abuse allegations use it, but only to explain obviously impossible events.

**Overzealous Intervenors.**

*Overzealous intervenors*, causing intervenor contagion, may be a fifth answer. These intervenors can include parents, family members, foster parents, doctors, therapists, social workers, law enforcement officers, prosecutors, and any combination thereof. Victims have been subtly as well as overtly rewarded and bribed by usually well-meaning intervenors for furnishing further details. In addition, some of what appears not to have happened may have originated as a result of intervenors making assumptions about or misinterpreting what the victims are saying. The intervenors then repeat, and possibly embellish, these assumptions and misinterpretations, and eventually the victims are "forced" to agree with or come to accept this "official" version of what happened.

The judgment of intervenors may be affected by their zeal to uncover child sexual abuse, satanic activity, or conspiracies. However "well-intentioned", these overzealous intervenors must accept varying degrees of responsibility for the unsuccessful prosecution of those cases where criminal abuse did occur. This is the most controversial and least popular of the alternative explanations.

**Urban Legends.**

Allegations of and knowledge about ritualistic or satanic abuse may also be spread through *urban legends*. In *The Vanishing Hitchhiker* (1981), the first of his four books on the topic, Dr. Jan Harold Brunvand defines urban legends as "realistic stories concerning recent events (or alleged events) with an ironic or supernatural twist" (p. xi). Dr. Brunvand's books convincingly explain that just because individuals throughout the country who never met each other tell the same story does not mean that it is true. Absurd urban legends about the corporate logos of Proctor and Gamble and Liz Claiborne being satanic symbols persist in spite of all efforts to refute them with reality. Some urban legends about child kidnappings and other threats to citizens have even been disseminated unknowingly by law enforcement agencies. Such legends have always existed, but today the mass media aggressively participate in their rapid and more efficient dissemination. Many Americans mistakenly believe that tabloid television shows check out and verify the details of their stories before pulling them on the air. Mass hysteria may partially account for large numbers of victims describing the same symptoms or experiences.

Training conferences for all the disciplines involved in child sexual abuse may also play a role in the spread of this contagion. At one child abuse conference I attended, an exhibitor was selling more than 50 different books dealing with satanism and the occult. By the end of the conference, he had sold nearly all of them. At another national child

sexual abuse conference, I witnessed more than 100 attendees copying down the widely disseminated 29 "Symptoms Characterizing Satanic Ritual Abuse" in preschool-aged children. Is a four-year-old child's "preoccupation with urine and feces" an indication of satanic ritual abuse or part of normal development?

**Combination.**

Most multidimensional child sex ring cases probably involve a *combination* of the answers previously set forth, as well as other possible explanations unknown to me at this time. Obviously, cases with adult survivors are more likely to involve some of these answers than those with young children. Each case of sexual victimization must be individually evaluated on its own merits without any preconceived explanations. All the possibilities must be explored if for no other reason than the fact that the defense attorneys for any accused subjects will almost certainly do so.

Most people would agree that just because a victim tells you one detail that turns out to be true, this does not mean that every detail is true. But many people seem to believe that if you can disprove one part of a victim's story, then the entire story is false. As previously stated, one of my main concerns in these cases is that people are getting away with sexually abusing children or committing other crimes because we cannot prove that they are members of organized cults that murder and eat people.

I have discovered that the subject of multidimensional child sex rings is a very emotional and polarizing issue. Everyone seems to demand that one choose a side. On one side of the issue are those who say that nothing really happened and it is all a big witch hunt led by overzealous fanatics and incompetent "experts". The other side says, in essence, that everything happened; victims never lie about child sexual abuse, and so it must be true.

There is a middle ground. It is the job of the professional investigator to listen to all the victims and conduct appropriate investigation in an effort to find out what happened, considering all possibilities. Not all childhood trauma is abuse. Not all child abuse is a crime. The great frustration of these cases is the fact that you are often convinced that something traumatic happened to the victim, but do not know with any degree of certainty exactly what happened, when it happened, or who did it.

## Do Victims Lie About Sexual Abuse And Exploitation?

The crucial central issue in the evaluation of a response to cases of multidimensional child sex rings is the statement "Children never lie about sexual abuse or exploitation. If they have details, it must have happened." This statement, oversimplified by many, is the basic premise upon which some believe the child sexual abuse and exploitation movement is based. It is almost never questioned or debated at training conferences. In fact, during the 1970s, there was a successful crusade to eliminate laws requiring corroboration of child victim statements in child sexual abuse cases. The best way to convict child molesters is to have the child victims testify in court. If we believe them, the jury will believe them. Any challenge to this basic premise was viewed as a threat to the movement and a denial that the problem existed.

I believe that children *rarely* lie about sexual abuse or exploitation, if a lie is defined as a statement deliberately and maliciously intended to deceive. The problem is the oversimplification of the statement. Just because a child is not lying does not necessarily mean the child is telling the truth. I believe that in the majority of these cases, the victims are not lying. They are telling you what they have come to believe has happened to them. Furthermore the assumption that children rarely lie about sexual abuse does not necessarily apply to everything a child says during a sexual abuse investigation. Stories of mutilation, murder, and cannibalism are not really about sexual abuse.

Children rarely lie about sexual abuse or exploitation. but they do fantasize, furnish false information, furnish misleading information, misperceive events, try to please adults, respond to leading questions, and respond to rewards. Children are not adults in little bodies and do go through developmental stages that must be evaluated and understood. In many ways, however, children are no better and no worse than other victims or witnesses of a crime. They should not be automatically believed, nor should they be automatically disbelieved.

The second part of the statement - if children can supply details, the crime must have happened - must also be carefully evaluated. The details in question in most of the cases of multidimensional child sex rings have little to do with sexual activity. Law enforcement and social workers must do more than attempt to determine how a child could have known about the sex acts. These cases involve determining how a victim could have known about a wide variety of bizarre and ritualistic activity. Young children may know little about specific sex acts, but they may know a lot about monsters, torture, kidnapping, and murder.

Victims may supply details of sexual and other acts using information from sources other than their own direct victimization. Such sources must be evaluated carefully by the investigator of multidimensional child sex rings.

**Personal Knowledge.**

The victim may have personal knowledge of the sexual or ritual acts, but not as a result of the alleged victimization. The knowledge could have come from viewing pornography, sex education, or occult material; witnessing sexual or ritual activity in the home; or witnessing the sexual abuse of others. It could also have come from having been sexually or physically abused, but by other than the alleged offenders and in ways other than the alleged offense.

**Other Children Or Victims.**

Young children today are socially interacting more often and at a younger age than ever before. Many parents are unable to provide possibly simple explanations for their children's stories because they were not with the children when the events occurred. They do not even know what videotapes their children may have seen, what games they may have played, or what stories they may have been told or overheard. Children are being placed in day care centers for eight, ten, or twelve hours a day starting as young as six weeks of age. The children share experiences by playing house, school, or doctor. Bodily functions such as urination and defecation are a focus of attention for these young children. To a certain extent, each child shares the experiences of all the other children.

The odds are fairly high that in any typical day care center there might be some children who are victims of incest; victims of physical abuse; victims of psychological abuse; children of cult members (even satanists); children of sexually open parents; children of sexually indiscriminate parents; children of parents obsessed with victimization; children of parents obsessed with the evils of satanism; children without conscience; children with a teenage brother or pregnant mother; children with heavy metal music and literature in the home; children with bizarre toys, games, comics, and magazines; children with a VCR and slasher films in their home; children with access to dial-a-porn, party lines, or pornography; or children victimized by a day care center staff member. The possible effects of the interaction of such children prior to the disclosure of the alleged abuse must be evaluated, Adult survivors may obtain details from group therapy sessions, support networks, church groups, or self-help groups. The willingness and ability of siblings to corroborate adult survivor accounts of ritual abuse varies. Some will support and partially corroborate the victim's allegations. Others will vehemently deny them and support their accused parents or relatives.

**Media.**

The amount of sexually explicit, occult, anti-occult, or violence- oriented material available to adults and even children in the modern world is overwhelming. This includes movies, videotapes, television, music, toys, and books. There are also documentaries on satanism, witchcraft, and the occult that are available on videotape. Most of the televangelists have videotapes on the topics that they are selling on their programs.

The National Coalition on Television Violence News (1988) estimates that 12% of the movies produced in the United States can be classified as satanic horror films. Cable television and the home VCR make all this material readily available even to young children. Religious broadcasters and almost all the television tabloid and magazine programs have done shows on satanism and the occult. Heavy metal and black metal music, which often has a satanic theme, is readily available and popular. In addition to the much-debated fantasy role-playing games, there are numerous popular toys on the market with an occult-oriented, bizarre, or violent theme.

Books on satanism and the occult, both fiction and nonfiction, are readily available in most bookstores, especially Christian bookstores. Several recent books specifically discuss the issue of ritual abuse of children. Obviously, very young children do not read this material, but their parents, relatives, and therapists might and then discuss it in front of or with them. Much of the material intended to fight the problem actually fuels the problem and damages effective prosecution.

**Suggestions And Leading Questions.**

This problem is particularly important in cases stemming from custody/visitation disputes involving at least one child under the age of seven. It is my opinion that most suggestive, leading questioning of children by intervenors is inadvertently done as part of a good-faith effort to learn the truth. Not all intervenors are in equal positions to potentially influence victim allegations. Parents and relatives especially are in a position to subtly influence their young children to describe their victimization in a certain way. Children may also overhear their parents discussing the details of the case. Children often tell their parents what they believe their parents want or need to hear. Some children may be instinctively attempting to provide "therapy" for their parents by telling them what seems to satisfy them and somehow makes them feel better. In one case a father gave the police a tape recording to "prove" that his child's statements were spontaneous disclosures and not the result of leading, suggestive questions. The tape recording indicated just the opposite. Why then did the father voluntarily give it to the police? Probably because he truly believed that he was not influencing his child's statements - but he was.

Therapists are probably in the best position to influence the allegations of adult survivors. The accuracy and reliability of the accounts of adult survivors who have been hypnotized during therapy is certainly open to question. One nationally-known therapist personally told me that the reason police cannot find out about satanic or ritualistic activity from child victims is that they do not know how to ask leading questions. Highly suggestive books and pictures portraying "satanic" activity have been developed and marketed to therapists for use during evaluation and treatment. Types and styles of verbal interaction useful in therapy may create significant problems in a criminal investigation. It should be noted, however, that when a therapist does a poor investigative interview as part of a criminal investigation, that is the fault of the criminal justice system that allowed it and not the therapist who did it.

The extremely sensitive, emotional, and religious nature of these cases makes problems with leading questions more likely than in other kinds of cases. Intervenors motivated by religious fervor and/or exaggerated concerns about sexual abuse of children are more likely to lose their objectivity.

**Misperception And Confusion.**

In one case, a child's description of the apparently impossible act of walking through a wall turned out to be the very possible act of walking between the studs of an unfinished wall in a room under construction. In another case, pennies in the anus turned out to be copper-foil-covered suppositories. The children may describe what they believe happened. It is not a lie, but neither is it an accurate account of what happened.

**Education And Awareness Programs.**

Some well-intentioned awareness programs designed to prevent child set abuse, alert professionals, or fight satanism may in fact be unrealistically increasing the fears of professionals, children, and parents and creating self-fulfilling prophesies. Some of what children and their parents are telling intervenors may have been learned in or fueled by such programs. Religious programs, books, and pamphlets that emphasize the power and evil force of Satan may be adding to the problem. In fact most of the day care centers in which ritualistic abuse is alleged to hate taken place are church- affiliated centers, and many of the adult survivors alleging it come from apparently religious families.

## Law Enforcement Perspective.

The perspective with which one looks at satanic, occult, or ritualistic crime is extremely important. As stated, sociologists, therapists, religious leaders, parents, and just plain citizens each have their own valid concerns and views about this issue. This discussion, however, deals primarily with the law enforcement or criminal justice perspective.

When you combine an emotional issue such as the sexual abuse of children with an even more emotional issue such as people's religious beliefs, it is difficult to maintain objectivity and remember the law enforcement perspective. Some police officers may even feel that all crime is caused by evil, all evil is caused by Satan, and therefore, all crime is satanic crime. This may be a valid religious perspective, but it is of no relevance to the investigation of crime for purposes of prosecution.

Many of the police officers who lecture on satanic or occult crime do not even investigate such cases. Their presentations are more a reflection of their personal religious beliefs than documented investigative information. They are absolutely entitled to their beliefs, but introducing themselves as current or former police officers and then speaking as religious advocates causes confusion. As difficult as it might be, police officers must separate the religious and law enforcement perspectives when they are lecturing or investigating in their official capacities as law enforcement officers. Many law enforcement officers begin their presentations by stating that they are not addressing or judging anyone's religious beliefs, and then proceed to do exactly that.

Some police officers have resigned rather than curtail or limit their involvement in this issue as ordered by their departments. Perhaps such officers deserve credit for recognizing that they could no longer keep the perspectives separate.

Law enforcement officers and all professionals in this field should avoid the "paranoia" that has crept into this issue and into some of the training conferences. Paranoid type belief systems are characterized by the gradual development of intricate, complex, and elaborate systems of thinking based on and often proceeding logically from misinterpretation of actual events. Paranoia typically involves hypervigilance over the perceived threat, the belief that danger is around every corner, and the willingness to take up the challenge and do something about it. Another very important aspect of this paranoia is the belief that those who do not recognize the threat are evil and corrupt. In this extreme view, you are either with them or against them. You are either part of the solution or part of the problem.

Overzealousness and exaggeration motivated by the true religious fervor of those involved is more acceptable than that motivated by ego or profit. There are those who are deliberately distorting and hyping this issue for personal notoriety and profit. Satanic and occult crime and ritual abuse of children has become a growth industry. Speaking fees, books, video and audio tapes, prevention material, television and radio appearances all bring egoistic and financial rewards.

Bizarre crime and evil can occur without organized satanic activity. The professional perspective requires that we distinguish between what we know and what we're not sure of.

The facts are:

1. Some individuals believe in and are involved in something commonly called satanism and the occult.
2. Some of these individuals commit crime.
3. Some groups of individuals share these beliefs and involvement in this satanism and the occult.
4. Some members of these groups commit crime together.

The unanswered questions are:

1. What is the connection between the belief system and the crimes committed?
2. Is there an organized conspiracy of satanic and occult believers responsible for interrelated serious crime (e.g., molestation, murder)?

After all the hype and hysteria are put aside, the realization sets in that most satanic/occult activity involves the commission of *no* crimes, and that which does usually involves the commission of relatively minor crimes such as trespassing, vandalism, cruelty to animals, or petty thievery.

The law enforcement problems most often linked to satanic or occult activity are:

1. Vandalism.
2. Desecration of churches and cemeteries.
3. Thefts from churches and cemeteries.
4. Teenage gangs
5. Animal mutilations.
6. Teenage suicide.
7. Child abuse.
8. Kidnapping.
9. Murder and human sacrifice

Valid evidence shows some "connection" between satanism and the occult and the first six problems (#a-f) set forth above. The "connection" to the last three problems (#g-i) is far more uncertain.

Even where there seems to be a "connection", the nature of the connection needs to be explored. It is easy to blame involvement in satanism and the occult for behaviors that have complex motivations. A teenager's excessive involvement in satanism and the occult is usually a symptom of a problem and not the cause of a problem. Blaming satanism for a teenager's vandalism, theft, suicide, or even act of murder is like blaming a criminal's offenses on his tattoos: Both are often signs of the same rebelliousness and lack of self- esteem that contribute to the commission of crimes.

The rock band Judas Priest was recently sued for allegedly inciting two teenagers to suicide through subliminal messages in their recordings. In 1991 Anthony Pratkanis of the University of California at Santa Cruz, who served as an expert witness for the defense, stated the boys in question "lived troubled lives, lives of drug and alcohol abuse, run-ins with the law...family violence, and chronic unemployment. What issues did the trial and the subsequent mass media coverage emphasize? Certainly not the need for drug treatment centers; there was no evaluation of the pros and cons of America's juvenile justice system, no investigation of the schools, no inquiry into how to prevent family violence, no discussion of the effects of unemployment on a family. Instead our attention was mesmerized by an attempt to count the number of subliminal demons that can dance on the end of a record needle" (p. 1).

The law enforcement investigator must objectively evaluate the legal significance of any criminal's spiritual beliefs. In most cases, including those involving satanists, it will have little or no legal significance. If a crime is committed as part of a spiritual belief system, it should make no difference which belief system it is. The crime is the same whether a child is abused or murdered as part of a Christian, Hare Krishna, Moslem, or any other belief system. We generally don't label crimes with the name of the perpetrator's religion. Why then are the crimes of child molesters, rapists, sadists, and murderers who happen to be involved in satanism and the occult labeled as satanic or occult crimes? If criminals use a spiritual belief system to rationalize and justify or to facilitate and enhance their criminal activity, should the focus of law enforcement be on the belief system or on the criminal activity?

Several documented murders have been committed by individuals involved in one way or another in satanism or the occult. In some of these murders the perpetrator has even introduced elements of the occult (e.g. satanic symbols at crime scene). Does that automatically make these satanic murders? It is my opinion that the answer is no. Ritualistic murders committed by serial killers or sexual sadists are not necessarily satanic or occult murders. Ritualistic murders committed by psychotic killers who hear the voice of Satan are no more satanic murders than murders committed by psychotic killers who hear the voice of Jesus are Christian murders.

Rather a satanic murder should be defined as one committed by two or more individuals who rationally plan the crime and whose *primary* motivation is to fulfill a prescribed satanic ritual calling for the murder. By this definition I have been unable to identify even one documented satanic murder in the United States. Although such murders may have and can occur, they appear to be few in number. In addition the commission of such killings would probably be the beginning of the end for such a group. It is highly unlikely that they could continue to kill several people, every year, year after year, and not be discovered.

A brief typology of satanic and occult practitioners is helpful in evaluating what relationship, if any, such practices have to crimes under investigation. The following typology is adapted from the investigative experience of Officer Sandi Gallant of the San Francisco Police Department, who began to study the criminal aspects of occult activity long before it became popular. No typology is perfect, but I use this typology because it is simple and offers investigative insights. Most practitioners fall into one of three categories, any of which can be practiced alone or in groups:

"**Youth Subculture.**

"Most teenagers involved in fantasy role-playing games, heavy metal music, or satanism and the occult are going through a stage of adolescent development and commit no significant crimes. The teenagers who have more serious problems are usually those from dysfunctional families or those who have poor communication within their families. These troubled teenagers turn to satanism and the occult to overcome a sense of alienation, to rebel, to obtain power, or to justify their antisocial behavior. For these teenagers it is the symbolism, not the spirituality, that is more important. It is either the psychopathic or the oddball, loner teenager who is most likely to get into serious trouble. Extreme involvement in the occult is a symptom of a problem, not the cause. This is not to deny, however, that satanism and the occult can be negative influences for a troubled teenager. But to hysterically warn teenagers to avoid this "mysterious, powerful and dangerous" thing called satanism will drive more teenagers right to it. Some rebellious teenagers will do whatever will most shock and outrage society in order to flaunt their rejection of adult norms.

"**Dabblers (Self-Styled).**

"For these practitioners there is little or no spiritual motivation. They may mix satanism, witchcraft, paganism, and any aspects of the occult to suit their purposes. Symbols mean whatever they want them or believe them to mean. Molesters, rapists, drug dealers, and murderers may dabble in the occult and may even commit their crimes in a ceremonial or ritualistic way. This category has the potential to be the most dangerous, and most of the "satanic" killers fall into this category. Their involvement in satanism and the occult is a symptom of a problem, and a rationalization and justification of antisocial behavior. Satanic/occult practices (as well as those of other spiritual belief systems) can also be used as a mechanism to facilitate criminal objectives.

"**Traditional (Orthodox).**

"These are the so-called true believers. They are often wary of outsiders. Because of this and constitutional issues, such groups are difficult for law enforcement to penetrate. Although there may be much we don't know about these groups, as of now there is little or no hard evidence that as a group they are involved in serious, organized criminal activity. In addition, instead of being self- perpetuating master crime conspirators, "true believers" probably have a similar problem with their teenagers rebelling against their belief system. To some extent even these Traditional satanists are self-stylized. They practice what they have come to believe is "satanism". There is little or no evidence of the much-discussed multigenerational satanists whose beliefs and practices have supposedly been passed down through the centuries. Many admitted adult satanists were in fact raised in conservative Christian homes."

*Washington Post* editor Walt Harrington reported in a 1986 story on Anton LaVey and his Church of Satan that "sociologists who have studied LaVey's church say that its members often had serious childhood problems like alcoholic parents or broken homes, or that they were traumatized by guilt-ridden fundamentalist upbringings, turning to Satanism as a dramatic way to purge their debilitating guilt" (p. 14).

Some have claimed that the accounts of ritual abuse victims coincide with historical records of what traditional or multigenerational satanists are known to have practiced down through the ages. Jeffrey Burton Russell, Professor of History at the University of California at Santa Barbara and the author of numerous scholarly books on the devil and satanism, believes that the universal consensus of modern historians on satanism is (personal communication, Nov. 1991):

1. "incidents of orgy, infanticide, cannibalism, and other such conduct have occurred from the ancient world down to the present;
2. such incidents were isolated and limited to local antisocial groups;
3. during the period of Christian dominance in European culture, such groups were associated with the Devil in the minds of the authorities;
4. in some cases the sectaries believed that they were worshiping Satan;
5. no organized cult of Satanists existed in the Christian period beyond localities, and on no account was there ever any widespread Satanist organization or conspiracy;
6. no reliable historical sources indicate that such organizations existed;
7. the black mass appears only once in the sources before the late nineteenth century."

Many police officers ask what to look for during the search of the scene of suspected satanic activity. The answer is simple: Look for evidence of a crime. A pentagram is no more criminally significant than a crucifix unless it corroborates a crime or a criminal conspiracy. If a victim's description of the location or the instruments of the crime includes a pentagram, then the pentagram would be evidence. But the same would be true if the description included a crucifix. In many cases of alleged satanic ritual abuse, investigation can find evidence that the claimed offenders are members only of mainstream churches and are often described as very religious.

There is no way any one law enforcement officer can become knowledgeable about all the symbols and rituals of every spiritual belief system that might become part of a criminal investigation. The officer needs only to be trained to recognize the possible investigative significance of such signs, symbols, and rituals. Knowledgeable religious scholars, academics, and other true experts in the community can be consulted if a more detailed analysis is necessary.

Any analysis, however, may have only limited application, especially to cases involving teenagers, dabblers, and other self-styled practitioners. The fact is signs, symbols, and rituals can mean anything that practitioners want them to mean and/or anything that observers interpret them to mean.

The meaning of symbols can also change over time, place, and circumstance. Is a swastika spray-painted on a wall an ancient symbol of prosperity and good fortune, a recent symbol of Nazism and anti-Semitism, or a current symbol of hate, paranoia, and adolescent defiance? The peace sign which in the 1960s was a familiar antiwar symbol is now supposed to be a satanic symbol. Some symbols and holidays become "satanic" only because the antisatanists say they are. Then those who want to be "satanists" adopt them, and now you have "proof" they are satanic.

In spite of what is sometimes said or suggested at law enforcement training conferences, police have no authority to seize any satanic or occult paraphernalia they might see during a search. A legally- valid reason must exist for doing so. It is not the job of law enforcement to prevent satanists from engaging in noncriminal teaching, rituals, or other activities.

## Investigating Multidimensional Child Sex Rings.

Multidimensional child sex rings can be among the most difficult, frustrating, and complex cases that any law enforcement officer will ever investigate. The investigation of allegations of recent activity from multiple young children under the age of seven presents one set of problems and must begin quickly, with interviews of *all*

potential victims being completed as soon as possible. The investigation of allegations of activity ten or more years earlier from adult survivors presents other problems and should proceed, unless victims are at immediate risk, more deliberately, with gradually-increasing resources as corroborated facts warrant.

In spite of any skepticism, allegations of ritual abuse should be aggressively and thoroughly investigated, This investigation should attempt to corroborate the allegations of ritual abuse. but should *simultaneously* also attempt to identify alternative explanations. The only debate is over how much investigation is enough. Any law enforcement agency must be prepared to defend and justify its actions when scrutinized by the public, the media, elected officials, or the courts. This does not mean, however, that a law enforcement agency has an obligation to prove that the alleged crimes did not occur. This is almost always impossible to do and investigators should be alert for and avoid this trap.

One major problem in the investigation of multidimensional child sex rings is the dilemma of recognizing soon enough that you have one. Investigators must be alert for cases with the potential for the four basic dynamics: (a) multiple young victims, (b) multiple offenders, (c) fear as the controlling tactic, and (d) bizarre or ritualistic activity. The following techniques apply primarily to the investigation of such multidimensional child sex rings:

**Minimize Satanic/Occult Aspect.**

There are those who claim that one of the major reasons more of these cases have not been successfully prosecuted is that the satanic/occult aspect has not been aggressively pursued. One state has even introduced legislation creating added penalties when certain crimes are committed as part of a ritual or ceremony. A few states have passed special ritual crime laws. I strongly disagree with such an approach. It makes no difference what spiritual belief system was used to enhance and facilitate or rationalize and justify criminal behavior. It serves no purpose to "prove" someone is a satanist. As a matter of fact, if it is alleged that the subject committed certain criminal acts under the influence of or in order to conjure up supernatural spirits or forces, this may very well be the basis for an insanity or diminished capacity defense, or may damage the intent aspect of a sexually motivated crime. The defense may very well be more interested in all the "evidence of satanic activity". Some of the satanic crime "experts" who train law enforcement wind up working or testifying for the defense in these cases.

It is best to focus on the crime and all the evidence to corroborate its commission. Information about local satanic or occult activity is only of value if it is based on specific law enforcement intelligence and not on some vague, unsubstantiated generalities from religious groups. Cases are not solved by decoding signs, symbols, and dates using undocumented satanic crime "manuals". In one case a law enforcement agency executing a search warrant seized only the satanic paraphernalia and left behind the other evidence that would have corroborated victim statements. Cases are solved by people- and behavior-oriented investigation. Evidence of satanic or occult activity may help explain certain aspects of the case, but even offenders who commit crimes in a spiritual context are usually motivated by power, sex, and money.

**Keep Investigation And Religious Beliefs Separate.**

I believe that one of the biggest mistakes any investigator of these cases can make is to attribute supernatural powers to the offenders. During an investigation a good investigator may sometimes be able to use the beliefs and superstitions of the offenders to his or her advantage. The reverse happens if the investigator believes that the offenders possess supernatural powers. Satanic/occult practitioners have no more power than any other human beings. Law enforcement officers who believe that the investigation of these cases puts them in conflict with the supernatural forces of evil should probably not be assigned to them. The religious beliefs of officers should provide spiritual strength and support for them but should not affect the objectivity and professionalism of the investigation.

It is easy to get caught up in these cases and begin to see "satanism" everywhere. Oversensitization to this perceived threat may cause an investigator to "see" satanism in a crime when it really is not there (quasi-satanism). Often the eye sees what the mind perceives. It may also cause an investigator not to recognize a staged crime

scene deliberately seeded with "satanic clues" in order to mislead the police (pseudo-satanism). On rare occasions an overzealous investigator or intervenor may even be tempted to plant "evidence of satanism" in order to corroborate such allegations and beliefs. Supervisors need to be alert for and monitor these reactions in their investigators.

**Listen To The Victims.**

It is not the investigator's duty to believe the victims; it is his or her job to listen and be an objective fact finder. Interviews of young children should be done by investigators trained and experienced in such interviews. Investigators must have direct access to the alleged victims for interview purposes. Therapists for an adult survivor sometimes want to act as intermediaries in their patient's interview. This should be avoided if at all possible. Adult survivor interviews are often confusing difficult and extremely time-consuming. The investigator must remember however that almost anything is possible. Most important the investigator must remember that there is much middle ground. Just because one event did happen does not mean that all reported events happened, and just because one event did not happen does not mean that all other events did not happen. Do not become such a zealot that you believe it all nor such a cynic that you believe nothing. Varying amounts and parts of the allegation may be factual. Attempting to find evidence of what did happen is the great challenge of these cases. *All* investigative interaction with victims must be carefully and thoroughly documented.

**Assess And Evaluate Victim Statements.**

This is the part of the investigative process in child sexual victimization cases that seems to have been lost. Is the victim describing events and activities that are consistent with law enforcement documented criminal behavior, or that are consistent with distorted media accounts and erroneous public perceptions of criminal behavior? Investigators should apply the "template of probability". Accounts of child sexual victimization that are more like books, television, and movies (e.g. big conspiracies, child sex slaves, organized pornography rings) and less like documented cases should be viewed with skepticism but thoroughly investigated. Consider and investigate all possible explanations of events. It is the investigator's job, and the information learned will be invaluable in counteracting the defense attorneys when they raise the alternative explanations.

For example, an adult survivor's account of ritual victimization might be explained by any one of at least four possibilities: First, the allegations may be a fairly accurate account what actually happened. Second, they may be deliberate lies (malingering), told for the usual reasons people lie (e.g. money, revenge, jealousy). Third, they may be deliberate lies (factitious disorder) told for atypical reasons (e.g. attention, forgiveness). Lies so motivated are less likely to be recognized by the investigator and more likely to be rigidly maintained by the liar unless and until confronted with irrefutable evidence to the contrary. Fourth, the allegations may be a highly inaccurate account of what actually happened, but the victim truly believes it (pseudomemory) and therefore is not lying. A polygraph examination of such a victim would be of limited value. Other explanations or combinations of these explanations are also possible. *Only* thorough *investigation* will point to the correct or most likely explanation.

Investigators cannot rely on therapists or satanic crime experts as a shortcut to the explanation. In one case, the "experts" confirmed and validated the account of a female who claimed to be a 15-year- old deaf-mute kidnapped and held for three years by a satanic cult and forced to participate in bizarre rituals before recently escaping. Active investigation, however, determined she was a 27- year-old woman who could hear and speak, who had not been kidnapped by anyone, and who had a lengthy history of mental problems and at least three other similar reports of false victimization. Her "accurate" accounts of what the "real satanists" do were simply the result of having read, while in mental hospitals, the same books that the "experts" had. A therapist may have important insights about whether an individual was traumatized, but knowing the exact cause of that trauma is another matter. There have been cases where investigation has discovered that individuals diagnosed by therapists as suffering from Post-Vietnam Syndrome were never in Vietnam or saw no combat.

Conversely, in another case, a law enforcement "expert" on satanic crime told a therapist that a patient's accounts of satanic murders in a rural Pacific Northwest town were probably true because the community was a hotbed of such satanic activity. When the therapist explained that there was almost no violent crime reported in the community, the officer explained that that is how you know it is the satanists. If you knew about the murders or found the bodies, it would not be satanists. How do you argue with that kind of logic?

The first step in the assessment and evaluation of victim statements is to determine the disclosure sequence, including how much time has elapsed since disclosure was first made and the incident was reported to the police or social services. The longer the delay, the bigger the potential for problems. The next step is to determine the number and purpose of *all prior* interviews of the victim concerning the allegations. The more interviews conducted before the investigative interview, the larger the potential for problems. Although there is nothing wrong with admitting shortcomings and seeking help, law enforcement should never abdicate its control over the investigative interview. When an investigative interview is conducted by or with a social worker or therapist using a team approach, law enforcement must direct the process. Problems can also be created by interviews conducted by various intervenors *after* the investigative interview(s).

The investigator must closely and carefully evaluate events in the victim's life before, during, and after the alleged abuse.

Events to be evaluated *before* the alleged abuse include:

1. Background of victim.
2. Abuse of drugs in home.
3. Pornography in home.
4. Play, television, and VCR habits.
5. Attitudes about sexuality in home.
6. Extent of sex education in home.
7. Activities of siblings.
8. Need or craving for attention.
9. Religious beliefs and training.
10. Childhood fears.
11. Custody/visitation disputes.
12. Victimization of or by family members.
13. Interaction between victims.

Events to be evaluated *during* the alleged abuse include:

1. Use of fear or scare tactics.
2. Degree of trauma.
3. Use of magic deception or trickery.
4. Use of rituals.
5. Use of drugs.
6. Use of pornography.

Events to be evaluated *after* the alleged abuse include:

1. Disclosure sequence.
2. Background of prior interviewers.
3. Background of parents.
4. Co-mingling of victims.
5. Type of therapy received.

**Evaluate Contagion.**

Consistent statements obtained from different multiple victims are powerful pieces of corroborative evidence - that is as long as those statements were not "contaminated". Investigation must carefully evaluate both pre- and post-disclosure contagion, and both victim and intervenor contagion. Are the different victim statements consistent because they describe common experiences or events, or because they reflect contamination or urban legends?

The sources of potential contagion are widespread. Victims can communicate with each other both prior to and after their disclosures. Intervenors can communicate with each other and with victims. The team or cell concepts of investigation are attempts to deal with potential investigator contagion. All the victims are not interviewed by the same individuals, and interviewers do not necessarily share information directly with each other. Teams report to a leader or supervisor who evaluates the information and decides what other investigators need to know.

Documenting existing contagion and eliminating additional contagion are crucial to the successful investigation and prosecution of these cases. There is no way, however, to erase or undo contagion. The best you can hope for is to identify and evaluate it and attempt to explain it. Mental health professionals requested to evaluate suspected victims must be carefully selected. Having a victim evaluated by one of the self-proclaimed experts on satanic ritual abuse or by some other overzealous intervenor may result in the credibility of that victim's testimony being severely damaged.

In order to evaluate the contagion element, investigators must meticulously and aggressively investigate these cases. The precise disclosure sequence of the victim must be carefully identified and documented. Investigators must verify through active investigation the exact nature and content of each disclosure outcry or statement made by the victim. Second-hand information about disclosure is not good enough.

Whenever possible, personal visits should be made to all locations of alleged abuse and the victim's homes. Events prior to the alleged abuse must be carefully evaluated. Investigators may have to view television programs, films, and videotapes seen by the victims. It may be necessary to conduct a background investigation and evaluation of everyone, both professional and nonprofessional, who interviewed the victims about the allegations prior to and after the investigative interview(s). Investigators must be familiar with the information about ritual abuse of children being disseminated in magazines, books, television programs, videotapes, and conferences. Every possible way that a victim could have learned about the details of the abuse must be explored if for no other reason than to eliminate them and counter the defense's arguments.

There may, however, be validity to these contagion factors. *They may explain some of the "unbelievable" aspects of the case and result in the successful prosecution of the substance of the case.* Consistency of statements becomes more significant if contagion is identified or disproved by independent investigation. The easier cases are the ones where there is a single, identifiable source of contagion. Most cases, however, seem to involve multiple contagion factors.

Munchausen Syndrome and Munchausen Syndrome by Proxy are complex and controversial issues in these cases. No attempt will be made to discuss them in detail, but they are documented facts (Rosenberg, 1987). Most of the literature about them focuses on their manifestation in the medical setting as false or self-inflicted illness or injury. They are also manifested in the criminal justice setting as false or self-inflicted crime victimization. If parents would poison their children to prove an illness, they might sexually abuse their children to prove a crime. "Victims" have been known to destroy property, manufacture evidence, and mutilate themselves in order to convince others of their victimization. The motivation is psychological gain (i.e. attention, forgiveness, etc.) and not necessarily money, jealousy, or revenge. These are the unpopular, but documented, realities of the world. Recognizing their existence does not mean that child sexual abuse and sexual assault are not real and serious problems.

**Establish Communication With Parents.**

The importance and difficulty of this technique in extrafamilial cases involving young children cannot be overemphasized. An investigator must maintain ongoing communication with the parents of victims in these abuse cases. Not all parents react the same way to the alleged abuse of their children. Some are very supportive and

cooperative. Others overreact and some even deny the victimization. Sometimes there is animosity and mistrust among parents with different reactions. Once the parents lose faith in the police or prosecutor and begin to interrogate their own children and conduct their own investigation, the case may be lost forever. Parents from one case communicate the results of their "investigation" with each other, and some have even contacted the parents in other cases. Such parental activity is an obvious source of potential contamination.

Parents must be made to understand that their children's credibility will be jeopardized when and if the information obtained turns out to be unsubstantiated or false. To minimize this problem, within the limits of the law and without jeopardizing investigative techniques, parents must be told on a regular basis how the case is progressing. Parents can also be assigned constructive things to do (e.g. lobbying for new legislation, working on awareness and prevention programs) in order to channel their energy, concern, and "guilt".

**Develop A Contingency Plan.**

If a department waits until actually confronted with a case before a response is developed, it may be too late. In cases involving ongoing abuse of children, departments must respond quickly, and this requires advanced planning. There are added problems for small- to medium-sized departments with limited personnel and resources. Effective investigation of these cases requires planning, identification of resources, and, in many cases, mutual aid agreements between agencies. The U.S. Department of Defense has conducted specialized training and has developed such a plan for child sex ring cases involving military facilities and personnel. Once a case is contaminated and out of control, I have little advice on how to salvage what may once have been a prosecutable criminal violation. A few of these cases have even been lost on appeal after a conviction because of contamination problems.

**Multidisciplinary Task Forces.**

Sergeant Beth Dickinson, Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department, was the chairperson of the Multi-Victim, Multi-Suspect Child Sexual Abuse Subcommittee. Sergeant Dickinson states (personal communication, Nov. 1989):

"One of the biggest obstacles for investigators to overcome is the reluctance of law enforcement administrators to commit sufficient resources early on to an investigation that has the potential to be a multidimensional child sex ring. It is important to get in and get on top of the investigation in a timely manner - to get it investigated in a timely manner in order to assess the risk to children and to avoid hysteria, media sensationalism, and cross-contamination of information. The team approach reduces stress on individual investigators, allowing for peer support and minimizing feelings of being overwhelmed."

The team approach and working together does not mean, however, that each discipline forgets its role and starts doing the other's job.

**Summary.**

The investigation of child sex rings can be difficult and time consuming. The likelihood, however, of a great deal of corroborative evidence in a multivictim/multioffender case increases the chances of a successful prosecution if the crime occurred. Because there is still so much we do not know or understand about the dynamics of multidimensional child sex rings, investigative techniques are less certain. Each new case must be carefully evaluated in order to improve investigative procedures.

Because mental health professionals seem to be unable to determine, with any degree of certainty, the accuracy of victim statements in these cases, law enforcement must proceed using the corroboration process. If some of what the victim describes is accurate, some misperceived, some distorted, and some contaminated, what is the jury supposed to believe? Until mental health professionals can come up with better answers, the jury should be asked to believe what the *investigation* can corroborate. Even if only a portion of what these victims allege is factual, that may still constitute significant criminal activity.

## Conclusion.

There are many possible alternative answers to the question of why victims are alleging things that don't seem to be true. The first step in finding those answers is to admit the possibility that some of what the victims describe may not have happened. Some experts seem unwilling to even consider this. Most of these victims are also probably not lying and have come to believe that which they are alleging actually happened. There are alternative explanations for why people who never met each other can tell the same story.

I believe that there is a middle ground - a continuum of possible activity. Some of what the victims allege may be true and accurate, some may be misperceived or distorted, some may be screened or symbolic, and some may be "contaminated" or false. The problem and challenge, especially for law enforcement, is to determine which is which. This can only be done through active investigation. I believe that the majority of victims alleging "ritual" abuse are in fact victims of some form of abuse or trauma. That abuse or trauma may or may not be criminal in nature. After a lengthy discussion about various alternative explanations and the continuum of possible activity, one mother told me that for the first time since the victimization of her young son she felt a little better. She had thought her only choices were that either her son was a pathological liar or, on the other hand, she lived in a community controlled by satanists.

Law enforcement has the obvious problem of attempting to determine what actually happened for criminal justice purposes. Therapists, however, might also be interested in what really happened in order to properly evaluate and treat their patients. How and when to confront patients with skepticism is a difficult and sensitive problem for therapists.

Any professional evaluating victims' allegations of "ritual" abuse cannot ignore or routinely dismiss the lack of physical evidence (no bodies or physical evidence left by violent murders); the difficulty in successfully committing a large-scale conspiracy crime (the more people involved in any crime conspiracy, the harder it is to get away with it); and human nature (intragroup conflicts resulting in individual self-serving disclosures are likely to occur in any group involved in organized kidnapping, baby breeding, and human sacrifice). If and when members of a destructive cult commit murders, they are bound to make mistakes, leave evidence, and eventually make admissions in order to brag about their crimes or to reduce their legal liability. The discovery of the murders in Matamoros, Mexico in 1989 and the results of the subsequent investigation are good examples of these dynamics.

Overzealous intervenors must accept the fact that some of their well-intentioned activity is contaminating and damaging the prosecutive potential of the cases where criminal acts did occur. We must all (i.e., the media, churches, therapists, victim advocates, law enforcement, and the general public) ask ourselves if we have created an environment where victims are rewarded, listened to, comforted, and forgiven in direct proportion to the severity of their abuse. Are we encouraging needy or traumatized individuals to tell more and more outrageous tales of their victimization? Are we making up for centuries of denial by now blindly accepting any allegation of child abuse no matter how absurd or unlikely? Are we increasing the likelihood that rebellious, antisocial, or attention- seeking individuals will gravitate toward "satanism" by publicizing it and overreacting to it? The overreaction to the problem can be worse than the problem.

The amount of "ritual" child abuse going on in this country depends on how you define the term. One documented example of what I might call "ritual" child abuse was the horror chronicled in the book *A Death in White Bear Lake* (Siegal, 1990). The abuse in this case, however, had little to do with anyone's spiritual belief system. There are many children in the United States who, starting early in their lives, are severely psychologically, physically, and sexually traumatized by angry, sadistic parents or other adults. Such abuse, however, is not perpetrated only or primarily by satanists. The statistical odds are that such abusers are members of mainstream religions. If 99.9% of satanists and 0.1% of Christians abuse children as part of their spiritual belief system, that still means that the vast majority of children so abused were abused by Christians.

Until hard evidence is obtained and corroborated, the public should not be frightened into believing that babies are being bred and eaten, that 50,000 missing children are being murdered in human sacrifices, or that satanists are taking over America's day care centers or institutions. No one can prove with absolute certainty that such activity

has *not* occurred. The burden of proof, however, as it would be in a criminal prosecution, is on those who claim that it has occurred.

The explanation that the satanists are too organized and law enforcement is too incompetent only goes so far in explaining the lack of evidence. For at least eight years American law enforcement has been aggressively investigating the allegations of victims of ritual abuse. There is little or no evidence for the portion of their allegations that deals with large-scale baby breeding, human sacrifice, and organized satanic conspiracies. Now it is up to mental health professionals, not law enforcement, to explain why victims are alleging things that don't seem to have happened. Professionals in this field must accept the fact that there is still much we do not know about the sexual victimization of children, and that this area desperately needs study and research by rational, objective social scientists.

If the guilty are to be successfully prosecuted, if the innocent are to be exonerated, and if the victims are to be protected and treated, better methods to evaluate and explain allegations of "ritual" child abuse must be developed or identified. Until this is done, the controversy will continue to cast a shadow over and fuel the backlash against the validity and reality of child sexual abuse.

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## Suggested Reading.

Cooper, John Charles, The Black Mask: Satanism in America Today . Old Tappen, N.J.: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1990.

Probably the best of the large number of books available primarily in Christian bookstores and written from the Christian perspective. This one, however, is written without the hysteria and sensationalism of most. Recommended for investigators who want information from this perspective.

Hicks, Robert D., In Pursuit of Satan: The Police and the Occult . Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books, 1991.

Undoubtedly the best book written to date on the topic of satanism and the occult from the law enforcement perspective. Robert D. Hicks is a former police officer who is currently employed as a criminal justice analyst for the state of Virginia. Must reading for any criminal justice professional involved in this issue. Unfortunately, in the chapter on "Satanic Abuse of Children", the author appears to have been overly influenced by extreme skeptics with minimal or questionable credentials in this area. The book is easy to read, logical, and highly recommended.

Richardson, James T.; Best, Joel; & Bromley, David G.; Eds, The Satanism Scare . NY: Aldine de Gruyter, 1991.

The best book now available on the current controversy over satanism written from the academic perspective, The editors and many of the chapter authors are college professors and have written an objective, well-researched book. One of the great strengths of this book is the fact that the editors address a variety of the controversial issues from a variety of disciplines (i.e., sociology, history, folklore, anthropology, criminal justice). Because of its academic perspective it is sometimes harder to read but is well worth the effort. The chapter on "Law Enforcement and the Satanic Crime Connection" contains the results of a survey of "Cult Cops" and is must reading for law enforcement officers. The chapter on "Satanism and Child Molestation: Constructing the Ritual Abuse Scare" was written, however, by a free-lance journalist who seems to take the position that these cases involve little or no real child abuse.

Terr, Lenore, Too Scared to Cry: Psychic Trauma in Childhood . New York: Harper and Row, 1990.

An excellent book written by a psychiatrist that provides important insights into the nature and recallability of early psychic trauma. For me, Dr. Terr's research and findings in the infamous Chowchilla kidnapping case shed considerable light on the "ritual" abuse controversy.

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